とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）2

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Toaru Majutsu no Index - Volume 2

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Toaru Majutsu no Index 2

"There, because the girl is currently being detained."

"Supernatural powers"; these are recognized as an ordinary science in Academy City, and that "Misawa Cram School" would be where that spellcaster was held. Also, it appears that the ringleader is someone from the side of magic. Kamijou Touma was given this explanation by the magician Stiyl, to which he meekly replied, "Yeah."

"I don't just need you to nod. Because you'll be coming along with me."

"... Haaaa!?"

Under the direct sunlight of midsummer, the two people head towards the ominous building that stands towering over its surroundings.

Magicians, Deep Blood, Index, and Kamijou Touma. The time where all the lines intersect, the story shall start...!

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Kamachi Kazuma

It would be a 3-D artwork this time around.
However, it can be said that because these notes are fictional, even if one were to persevere, nothing can be seen. Things like people being able to see, perhaps, are the placebo effects. Let's do some psychic healing.

(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index

Toaru Majutsu no Index 2

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Born on September 7, 1973. A troubled person whose patterns change on the mood at the time. Recently troubled badly about whether to buy a microwave oven or a HDD packaged with a DVD collection first.

カバー／あかつきBP

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"You'll be that!? Did you just say that!?"
Nun and keeper of the Index of Prohibited Books — Index
"Alright. I'll be that."
Unidentified miko-san — Himegami Aisa
High school student of Academy City — Kamijou Touma

"I'll kill you if you laugh at me like that!"
Magician — Stiyl Magnus

"It has been a while, Index. Your unchanging appearance makes me very happy."
Alchemist — Aureolus Izzard
"How, can this be... This alchemy spell, Ars Magna?"

"I'm a spellcaster."
"Ummm, what's a spellcaster?"

“You’re going to cut off my right hand—!?”

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Prologue: The Same Usual Every Day. *The_Beginning _of_The_End.*

To understand a person, one must simply examine their bookshelf.

“...A pile of manga.”

The date was August 8th. Kamijou Touma looked around the room and found that he could not find a single book that was not manga on not only on his bookshelf but throughout the house. Thus, in order to save face, Kamijou Touma had decided to head to the train station of Academy City and purchase some reference books.

...He went there.

“To think that one reference book costs 3,600 yen (a. $43.58)...” muttered Kamijou Touma as if he had recently lost terribly in a great battle. And, according to the shop attendant, every reference book was sold at half price until yesterday in order to promote the summer exams.

Such misfortune. It truly was unfortunate.

However, this was the essence of Kamijou Touma's everyday's life. Additionally, he was popular simply because his friends felt that "with him around, he’ll absorb our bad luck like a lightning rod.”

The problem was the precariousness of the situation.

It was imperative that he avoided the label, "someone with only manga on his bookshelf". Of course, his thought processes were abnormal. An ordinary person would disregard unscientific claims like “to understand a person, one must simply examine their bookshelf.”

It was because Kamijou Touma had lost his memory.

Naturally, everything was not forgotten. He still knew how to read traffic lights and operate his cell phone. He lost his “memories”; “knowledge” was intact.

Though he knew how to use a cell phone, his brain would wonder “Eh? Where I did I put my phone?” or “Hold on, since when did I have a phone?”

His apparent "knowledge" was like a dictionary.

For example, one might know that “apples” were the “fruit of the Rosaceous deciduous tree which bloom in spring with a round shape.” But, to decide if it were tasty, one had to eat an apple. His brain lacked the diary-like memory of “I ate a delicious apple on month X, day Y.”

He was told that the reason was because the “experience memory” (memories) part of his brain, rather than the “meaningful memory” (information) part, was destroyed. However, this was not the main issue.

Kamijou Touma wanted to know what sort of person he was before he "lost his memory"; even if it meant that he had to adhere to some baseless claim like “one must simply examine their bookshelf.” But, it did not mean that Kamijou’s expression was that of pain.

After all, Kamijou was not alone in the world and was not thrown into some unknown environment. He had food, clothes and friends he could call companions.

“Touma!”

Returning home on a summer day, a girl beside the half-dead Kamijou cried out angrily in the face of the sudden shopping spree. Kamijou had gone out on this assault and spend more than 1000 yen (a. $12.11).

Around 13 or 14 years old, one could tell that she was foreign. She had waist-length silver hair, skin as white as snow emerald green eyes. Despite all of that, the plainly obvious foreignness of hers was the outfit.

She wore a Christian nun’s habit that was uniquely white and with gold lacings. It seemed like the gold-outlined cups that upstarts enjoyed using.

Her name was Index. Of course, it was a fake name but Index was what

everyone had called her.

Kamijou met her in the hospital. Or rather, from Kamijou's perspective, he met her at the hospital but it appeared that he had already met her prior to his memory loss. Though Kamijou recalled nothing related to the girl no matter how he tried, he avoided saying it aloud.

The day he first met her, she cried tears of happiness to see him on the bed. However, her tears were shed not for the current Kamijou but the Kamijou prior.

He could not bear to break the joy in the girl’s heart. In order to protect her warmth, Kamijou Touma formed a façade as the Kamijou Touma before his memory loss.

It was a complicated feeling, as if Kamijou Touma were two people.

However, the girl called Index, seemed ignorant of Kamijou’s inner conflict (though, to be fair to her, he avoided her realization). Shorter than Kamijou by a head, she looked up and started unhappily at him.

“Touma, what could we have done with 3,600 yen?”

“...Don't ask.”

“What could we have done?” The girl asked again.

Just as Kamijou stuffed his ears and shut his eyes, shouting "DON'T SAY IT!" to escape from reality, he suddenly realized that the girl walking beside him was looking elsewhere.

With curiosity, Kamijou followed her gaze and found that the shop sign of an ice cream shop was spinning before him.

It was August 8th, a considerably hot summer afternoon, and because of the heat waves floating up, Index’s long-sleeved habit should have been hot…

“...I understand your feelings, but isn't spending 3,600 yen a bit much?”

“Hmph.” She seemed unhappy with his words and turned to look at Kamijou.

“Touma, I didn’t say I’m hot or about to get heatstroke. Of course I never thought about spending someone else’s money to satisfy myself so I didn’t think about eating ice cream at all.”

“…Okay, okay. I know nuns don’t tell lies but you don’t have to sweat and give me those abandoned puppy-dog eyes, right? Can’t you just tell me that you want to eat ice cream in an air-conditioned room? The weather’s so hot but you’re still wearing that nun’s habit, something that doesn’t consider the impact of the weather. You might get heatstroke like that.”

Though he sounded quite generous, it was just his saving face. The amount of money in his wallet would not change. Of course, it did not mean that he could not even buy ice cream, but if he did, he would be short money to get a ride back home. Academy City was one-third the size of Tokyo, and for Kamijou (who had just recovered from considerable injuries) and the physically weak Index, it was not a place they could trek with ease. Though the term “weak girls” may have been sexist, girls that could walk one-third the length of Tokyo were few.

Index seemed unhappy somehow and began to get angrier. She frowned, “Touma, this clothing is a materialization of God’s protection. I never even thought about how hard it is to wear, how hot it is, how it’s troublesome or how there should be a summer or winter version.”

"...Right..."

Righteousness and kindness were two different things and Kamijou Touma understood that cruel reality. There was something off however. Why were there safety pins all over a habit with such extravagant designs?

"And besides, I'm still a nun-in-training. Besides cigarettes and wine, I’m forbidden from having any luxury items… even coffee, red tea, fruits, sweets, iced items…"

"Oh, I see. At first, I thought about saying that eating ice cream is a good way to relieve the summer heat." When people adhered to religious principles, it was impossible to change their minds. Kamijou again stared at the signboard of the ice cream shop. "If that's the case, okay. It's not like we need to eat it—"

Before Kamijou could finish speaking, a hand suddenly grabbed him at mach one. Kamijou, unable to resist the powerful force exerted by the girl's fingers,

was forced to turn his head around.

"It's... it's true that I'm still in training, and that I'm forbidden from having any excessive stuff."

"Then, no way."

"But since I'm still in training, it means that I can't completely follow a saint's standards, right? So, in this situation, maybe there'll be a case where some ice cream accidentally went into my mouth. Isn't that right, Touma?"

"..." Though Kamijou badly desired to lecture her, the force exerted by the girl's fingers became stronger, seemingly conveying to him to say nothing more. However, the naïve Index knew not that silence could be worse than a rebuttal.

…At that moment…

"Yo, sorry to disturb y'all from this important conversation, but who's that gal, Kami-yan?"

...A mysterious fake Kansai accent sounded from behind.

Looking back, it was a weirdo whose voice was even stranger. 180 centimeters tall, blue-haired, ear-pierced… he was too odd to be a weirdo.

Did the "Kamijou with his memories" really have such a friend? Kamijou could not help but ask. He felt like he was lecturing others as he cursed himself. *Even if I don't know what relationship I have with this guy (I did lose my memories), I should at least choose my friends better!*

"Hm, what's up, Kami-yan? Why are you looking at me like a stranger? Did the summer heat cause ya to lose ya memories?"

"What...?" Kamijou was shocked. Aogami Pierce, however, raised his hand and waved it about.

"I'm just joking, man~. This memory loss thing is a special privilege only to those unbelievable wave-emitting girls[1] Then, Aogami Pierce put his hand on Kamijou's shoulder (though it was ridiculously hot). "...Yo, Kami-yan, who's that gal? How do ya know such a small girl? Is she ya cousin...? Doesn't look like it.

Her silver hair doesn't look inherited from ya gene pool!"

The big issue with Aogami was that his whispers failed at being whispers.

Kamijou broke into cold sweat, worried whether the girl beside him would go ballistic because of the word "small"... but luckily, it seemed that it would not be the case.

"...From the way I see it, this gal must only be asking directions from ya, right? But with ya English still country-isolated, it must be pretty hard for ya... Hold on, is that gal from an English-speaking country?"

Kamijou knew not what he was talking about and for Index perhaps she was rather used to having others calling her "small". She seemed unmindful, only glaring viciously at the sun that burned down, perhaps so hot that she did not want to speak.

"...Speaking of which, Kami-yan, I don't know where ya met this gal, but don't get relaxed by this. After all, ya gained sixteen years of trust and good-man performances, so ya should know that a "simple meeting with a gal" isn't possible. Isn't it like that in romantic comedies? The one with the crush is always like a young mother! Haha~ if such an event happens, all hope is gone! It's really pitiful to think about."

Kamijou heaved a sigh of relief. It was a good thing that the events of his life were not an old-fashioned dramas case. The, Aogami Pierce spoke again, *"Hold on, is that a cross-dressing trap? Isn't 'her' chest a little too small?"*

Immediately, Kamijou seemed to hear the girl's blood vessels explode. Kamijou forced himself suppress a blood-curdling cry. It seemed that while the girl could endure being called young, being called a boy was out of the question.

Kamijou seemed to hear her barely maintain her smile as she gnashed her teeth.

Such misfortune...! Just as Kamijou wanted to shout…

"Oi, Kami-yan. How could great men like us be good friends with a 3D gal? There'll definitely be a Bad End. I can see it: just as Kami-yan takes off the final piece of clothing from the gal and goes into the R18 moment, ya finally find out the truth and roll off the bed in shock."

"...You're joking, right? Don't tell me you actually feel that way!"

"Eh? Is she really a gal? How uninteresting!" Aogami Pierce said with a gleeful expression. "So ya encounter must be abnormal, right? Kami-yan, though ya always been a good guy nobody loved, ya can't just kidnap a gal, you know? Such foolhardiness will get flamed on those image boards when ya leave them there."

"Idiot... stop joking! Who'd do such a thing!?" …But in reality, Kamijou did not know how they met. "This person here is just a freeloader! Everything was done through negotiations with both sides, sergeant-dono!"

"'Freeloader'? 'Freeloader'? Kami-yan, ya just added a 'just' to an extremely precious 'freeloader gal'? Kami-yan! Ya like an elementary school kid who just ate too many snacks and forgot the essence of rice!"

"Shut up! How can I express it except with a 'just'!? Since when do romantic scenes happen that often in real life!? Do you know how Kamijou's finances are in a crisis because of this person right here!? Even Zashiki-warashi's better than her…!"

As Kamijou shouting continued, he realized something. Naturally, the girl Index was nearby and heard all of it.

"...Ah." Kamijou turned back with an expression of terror.

Index smiled. She revealed a Virgin Mary-like smile but her face was as green as honey dew. Terrible. Not knowing what "the Kamijou Touma with memories" would do, he was unaware whether he once knew how to quell her. *If I did know, then this amnesia is really a pity*, Kamijou thought.

"Touma." Index spoke, revealing a perfect smile.

It's all over, Kamijou thought, unable to respond.

"I'm a nun affiliated with the Anglican Church. Repent now or forever hold your peace."

The nun drew a cross in front of her chest, and clasped her hands together. Because the smile was too impeccable, one could tell that it was a guise.

Kamijou unknowingly desired to clutch his head and cry out.

This was a bomb—no—an unexploded mortar. *If I handle this carelessly, it may explode, and this will be the end of my life!* Kamijou's instincts told him thus.

What should I do what should I do? Ah! That's it, ice cream! Use ice cream to distract her! Now extremely confused, Kamijou forgot how to speak and could only crazily point in the direction of the ice cream shop near them. Index peered in the direction of his finger and stopped. She then revealed puzzled look.

Just as Kamijou heaved a sigh of relief, thinking that he managed to divert her attention, he suddenly noticed something. There was a piece of paper on the automatic door which read:

"To our customers,

Due to interior renovations, we will be suspending our business for the time being. We apologize for any inconveniences."

His mind recalled a Bad End and Kamijou slowly turned his head towards the girl beside him.

The girl's smile instantly vanished.

"Such misfortune!" Kamijou shouted and the savage beast Index pounced.

In the end they compromised and agreed to buy shakes from a cheap fast food restaurant.

Of course, Index was not completely satisfied so Kamijou tried to incentivize her with the pretense of "enjoying the food in an air-conditioned room". However, the shop was actually completely crammed in the afternoon.

"..."

Holding the tray with both hands, Index looked unhappy once again and remained silent. There were three shakes on the tray: one vanilla, one chocolate, and one strawberry. Though Kamijou truly wanted to shout "Are you that thirsty?" he dared not to retort out of fear that his life would be at risk.

Such misfortune, Kamijou thought.

Index, whose mood somewhat improved after getting three shakes for herself, was now facing a tough situation: the shop was completely filled with customers. But, the temperature was so hot that staying outside was not an option. They had finally managed to enter a shop with air conditioning so who would want to go back to the streets and stand under the sun?

The nearby female high school students seemed to fail to realize Kamijou's despair as they continued to talk about extremely ordinary topics.

"Hey, hey! I heard that Anzai used telepathy during the last exam! Is it true?"

"I heard that they even organized a teachers' meeting because of that, so it must be true. But, I also heard that everyone at the meeting agreed that esper powers are a part of the Curriculum, so it isn’t considered cheating."

"UU, THAT'S DESPICABLE! NYAAA!! THEN I WANT TO USE MY POWER AS WELL!"

"...Isn't your power pyrokinesis?"

"Can't I just set fire to the teacher's back and force him to spill the answers?"

...Perhaps to most, such a conversation would have been too out of the ordinary. But, as it was Academy City, such things were very common parts of their everyday lives. As the 2.3 million citizens of the city had some sort of power, it could have been called a large-scale "power development group".

In fact, Kamijou was an esper. He was the boy called the "Imagine Breaker". He possessed a right hand that could "negate any supernatural power, even one of God's miracles".

"...Touma, I really want to sit down." said Index in an emotionless tone.

Scary. The nun’s expression conveyed to him that if he did not comply, she would again leap and bite him.

"AFFIRMATIVE!" Kamijou shouted and rushed to a shop attendant who was sweeping the floor.

The shop attendant merely revealed a cruel, professional smile and pointed to a corner by the window.

Sit together? Kamijou looked over at where the finger's pointing.

"Uuu!?"

In the shop that was like a rush hour train station, there was a four-seater table in the corner. A huge space appeared in the middle of the crowd like a huge hole.

Over there, on that table, sat a sleeping miko. Jellyfish-like shiny black hair was scattered, covering the miko's face.

This... What's with this scenario? Kamijou cried out in his heart.

Not right, something's not right. Kamijou's misfortune radar warned him. *Don't get involved with her, don't get involved with her, you'll definitely meet misfortune! When it happens, it won't be something solved by amnesia!*

Of course, Kamijou Touma, as an unlucky person, did not seek misfortune. He closed his eyes and made his decision. *...Alright, let's go home! I'd rather get bitten by Index than get involved with such a person.*

Having made this conclusion, Kamijou turned back to find that both Index and Aogami had already disappeared.

"...?" Kamijou looked around. "...Ack!"

As expected, under the suggestion of the shop attendant, Index had already sat opposite that mysterious miko. The girl truly lacked awareness for danger. Or was she a philanthropist? As for Aogami Pierce, who sat beside them, his eyes were gleaming. *Are you really that attracted to nuns and mikos?*

He honestly and truly wanted to run away. But he could not. If he turned his back on Index and ran away, Index might have leaped at him like a lion and swallow him whole. Seeing Aogami Pierce, whose eyes glittered, Kamijou felt that it was too dangerous to leave the girl alone.

But most importantly, Index, who had some strawberry shake in her mouth, waved at him happily. Kamijou felt that he should preserve that happy

expression.

Though he though as such, there was a mysterious miko sleeping. Kamijou carefully approached the table. The same moment, the miko's shoulders jerked.

"Sp—" Her mouth moved. The miko's mouth moved. Kamijou had a bad feeling, a very bad feeling. Why? Having lost his memories, Kamijou definitely remembered nothing but somehow had a feeling that he already had a similar experience.

He gulped down his saliva, waiting for the miko to speak.

"—Spent all my money and ruined myself."

Chapter 1: A Tower of Glass. *The_Tower _of_BABEL.*

Part 1

It was a windowless room.

There were no doors, stairs, lifts, or corridors. As a part of the building, the room had no functionality. There was no way to enter the building except via a Level 4 esper's teleportation ability. It could have been said to be the most impenetrable stronghold.

A single magician stood within the Calculate Fortress building that's strength easily surpassed that of a nuclear shelter.

His name was Stiyl Magnus.

Stiyl, a well-versed runic magician, especially in fire magic, was also an Anglican priest. A fourteen year old versed in magic and fully capable of killing other magicians could have been said to be a rarity.

Truthfully, he should not have been there.

Instead of the building, he should not have been in the city entirely. He was a member of the Christian sect Necessarius while Academy City was a purely scientific body that rejected the supernatural and instead produced espers via drugs, body manipulation and hypnotism.

As of then, his presence was as unnatural as shuffling a tarot card into a poker deck.

However, there was reason for his presence however unnatural it was. He was acting as a liaison for the Anglican Church in order to negotiate with Academy

City on equal footing. However, as far as representatives go, he was a flawed one.

He was a man who would kill with no hesitation and could order flames to swallow a human being without a thought.

"..."

Despite it all, he was still fazed by the scene before him.

The area was too large to be described as in-doors and there was supposedly no lighting. However, the room was filled with starry lights because of the numerous flashing screens and buttons. Equips of all sizes, thousands of cables and tubes were gathered at the center of the room like blood vessels on the floor.

An enormous cylinder was centered in the room.

It was four meters in diameter and over ten meters in height. The cylindrical container of reinforced glass was filled with a red liquid.

The color was said to represent a weakly alkaline recovery fluid. Of course, to magician Stiyl, the scientific were not in his field of expertise and would not understand even after an explanation.

A human wearing a green surgical cloak floated upside down.

No word beside “human” could have described him. The silver-haired “human” appeared like a man but somehow feminine, like an adult but somehow childlike, like a saint but somehow criminal.

Had he obtained all of the possibilities that a "human" can only dream of? Or did he give up on all the possibilities that a "human" had?

Whichever it was, the only word that could describe him was “human”.

"Everyone who comes here observes me and has a response similar to yours.” The "human" in the cylinder spoke. He sounded like a man but somehow feminine, like an adult but somehow childlike, like a saint but somehow criminal.

"...Why let a human do it when machines can as well?"

It was how that "human" existed.

His own life was maintained by machines and so it was meaningless for him to act as he did. This "human" who seemed like he had extended his lifespan to 1700 years was now before Stiyl.

Stiyl felt fear.

He feared not the scientific technology of Academy City that could operate lives for humans but the way the “human” existed. As he had the option of machinery, he could have abandoned his body of flesh without a thought and offer himself to the machines.

It was terrifying to meet a “human” twisted enough to live that way.

"I suppose you want to know why I called you here..." The General Director of Academy City, the "human" Aleister who floated upside-down, spoke with a stern tone. "The situation has become complicated as of now."

Hearing Aleister say this, Stiyl inadvertently frowned. He could not imagine that the “human” before him would show weakness with a statement like “the situation has become complicated as of now.”

"It's regarding Deep Blood, am I correct?"

Stiyl, who normally neglected honorifics, used them with Aleister.

Of course, rather than his status as "liaison for the Anglican Church," he also he knew that if Aleister detected hostility, he would be cut into pieces.

It was not an overall issue of hostility; even if it were misunderstanding or misconception, if Aleister decided it, Stiyl’s life would end.

It was because they were in the enemy’s base, the command center for 2.3 million espers.

"Fuu."

Noticing Stiyl's trembling, Aleister spoke. "It wouldn't be a problem if this were an esper-only issue, because it would be one of the espers I 'had'. As long as it's a citizen in this city that creates a commotion, there are about 70,632 ways to handle it and clean up..."

"..."

The words invoked no particular feeling from Stiyl. He was uninterested in Academy City procedure and lacked understanding of how the science side operated.

"...The complications are because a magician has taken part in this when he should have not.”

Thus, Stiyl pondered it.

Deep Blood: The Blood-Sucking Killer. The name came not from Academy City databases but the Great English Library.

From the wording, one could imagine that its purpose was to kill "something” which may or may not have existed. None knew what sort of ability it was or whether or not it was even genuine. All that was known was that a girl possessed the power.

In particular, the girl with Deep Blood was being held prisoner by a magician.

The situation was that simple. “Fu. Because the enemy is an outsider to this city, it has become troublesome.”

Aleister remained inverted and spoke. "Of course, it would be trivial to send out 2.3 million espers to crush one or two magicians. But, this isn't the main issue. If we did that, it would mean that the science side defeated magicians."

Academy City and Necessarius each had its own “world”, a sphere of influence.

“Powers” and the “supernatural”… it was because each monopolized technologies that they could keep their positions. If Academy City, which controlled “espers”, declared that they had defeated a “magician”, those on the magic side would not remain silent.

For example, if the latest fighter jets crash-landed in enemy territory, the wreckage could reveal the secret technology.

“It seems it’d difficult for you to send in reinforcements.” Stiyl said calmly. Espers and magicians coordinating… may have been too precarious. It was already problematic to decide between the two who would lead because of the excuse of checking the other’s battle abilities in order to spy on the technology.

Considering this, Stiyl formed a question. Two weeks ago, he entered Academy City, and had a battle with an esper. Why was the battle allowed so silently? Perhaps, beyond Stiyl’s knowledge, the two had made an agreement. Or perhaps because he was a Level 0, he held little importance.

The situation at the moment, however, was different. Most of the espers and magicians involved were considered “important people”.

"I see. So that's why you specifically asked me, an 'exception', to be here." Stiyl's expression did not change but seemingly had confirmed something.

Essentially, Stiyl Magnus was an exception. There would have been problems if espers from the science side defeated magicians from the magic side. However, there would be no issue if Stiyl, a member of the magic side, defeated a magician. Additionally, Stiyl’s superior also felt it important that the magician be defeated by a magician for the sake of cleaning house.

"This is the blueprint of the 'battlefield' in question."

It was unknown what technology was used to form an image in the darkness. The hologram seemed like computer graphics and the image of a building seemed ordinary enough. Then, a positional diagram of the "battlefield" appeared.

The words “Misawa Cram School” were written on the corner of the diagram.

"Through the initial building blueprints and various satellite images, we have analyzed the interior layout." Aleister's voice lacked cadence and tone. "However, we know not the magic equipment inside. Regardless, we have no understanding of magic."

"..."

"This 'Misawa Cram School' is somewhat unique." Aleister began to explain. Incidentally, Academy City was an educational enterprise consisting of hundreds of schools of different sizes. Also, the Curriculum included the paranormal, such as esper development.

It was said that Misawa Cram School catered to all of the levels of society in the country and was set up as a school in Academy City to learn the secrets of esper development exclusive to the city. It had the makings of a large corporate spy incident.

However, Misawa Cram School, which knew nothing about power development, gave off a strange impression. Perhaps it was a science cult that used the exclusivity of the scientific knowledge as a reason they were chosen by God, creating a new religion.

Misawa Cram School had even begun to go out of control and rejected the main branch's orders and did something extreme: they imprisoned the Deep Blood in accordance to the religion.

"But why must they imprison Deep Blood? Are their teachings like 16th century fanatics to achieve immortality?"

"No. Misawa Cram School lacks true existence. Essentially, they simply desire a unique esper whose power cannot be duplicated. Anyone would do."

"?"

"Levels in Academy City are decided by aptitude and power. Thus, they wanted to take the Deep Blood and examine her. As long as they could use the slogan 'we duplicated a super rare ability', students lamenting that they have ordinary abilities or Level 2s or 3s will be attracted by it... Such idiocy. They cannot change their developed power even with a brain transplant."

However, it sounded strange. Even if having a rare ability were a cultural unique in Academy City, how could anyone believe that Deep Blood, from the magic side, existed in a scientific environment?

Just as Stiyl's considered it, Aleister casually stated the answer.

"Furthermore, objects are more valuable if rare. As long as such basic logic exists, there will be points of contention. There are many espers with unknown truths behind their powers beside Imagine Breaker. Some espers possess such tremendous power that none have seen them in a serious state."

It if it were just that Deep Blood was imprisoned, the situation would be simple. However, as Aleister had said, conflicts in the city had 70,632 solutions.

This was not the issue.

Before the situation was settled, a magician came from the outer world and invaded Misawa. He aimed for Misawa. Instead of destroying it he usurped it, transforming it into such a complicated situation.

"..." Stiyl silently stared at the diagram of Misawa. He could not see any objects modified by magic. A tension like charging into complete darkness enveloped Stiyl. Though an uncomfortable sensation, it was one he was accustomed to. It was a battle of life or death, nil or one.

He was rather unhappy that he was to battle alone in a city housing 2.3 million espers.

"Not quite." Seemingly reading Stiyl's mind, Aleister spoke. Perhaps there was a machine that could analyze a person's mind with temperatures or blood flows. "I do possess an esper who is a magician's natural enemy." Stiyl immediately froze.

Imagine Breaker: the boy who fought a life or death battle against Stiyl two weeks priors. All supernatural powers, regardless whether magic, ESP, or a Godly miracle were negated upon contact with his right hand. Such a power was considered an exception among exceptions.

"But, didn't you say that you can't use any espers to beat a magician?"

"You need not worry about it." Aleister spoke in a tone as if he had memorized

it, "Firstly, as a level 0 he carries no valuable information. If I were to allow working with you, there is no fear of an information leak."

"..."

"Secondly, his lacks the intelligence to analyze magic side technology and duplicate it accordingly. Thus, even if he were to go with you, your technology would not be stolen by us."

That old fox... for the first time, Stiyl harbored tangible hatred for Aleister. *What is this 'human' in front of me thinking about?* Stiyl did not understand. No matter what, Imagine Breaker definitely should not have been classified as Level 0. He experienced it first hand in battle.

It was true that the functionality of Imagine Breaker was not something that could be understood with an examination or two and he most certainly could not duplicate it and return it to the Church. However, it should have been the same case for Academy City. Or rather, Stiyl hope it was the same. If Academy City had a way to duplicate Imagine Breaker, the Church's existence would have been jeopardized. Even weapons with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of year could be destroyed by contact with his hand.

However, Aleister did not seem to treasure the precious Imagine Breaker at all. It was as if he were giving a saint a number of trials. He was like a heavy hammer striking a piece of scorching metal into the shape of a powerful sword.

"..."

And, more importantly, the boy had the knowledge of the 103,000 grimoires beside him. Was using him a sound measure? His inner thoughts conflicted with his words. Though Stiyl harbored such suspicions, he suppressed them from appearing on his face. Careful not to show it, because of the girl's involvement, Stiyl did not want to raise unneeded problems.

"...Deep Blood." Stiyl muttered. His expression was like that of a scholar perplexed by something found that was unexplainable. "Does Deep Blood really exist? If it does that means--"

Stiyl could not continue.

Deep Blood. If there were Deep Blood, then the species to be killed must have existed. In other words, if the existence of Deep Blood were to be believed, then the other something had to exist as fact.

"Hm, the occult is not a scientist’s specialty. But, you magicians—including your world— have to admit that some truly supernatural exists, right?”

Of course. Stiyl cursed in his heart.

The magical energy that magicians used could have been described as similar to gasoline. In other words, using their lifespan and life-force, the “crude oil”, was refined via breathing, blood flowing, and thinking into “gasoline” for simpler use.

Thus, magicians were not omnipotent. No matter how they sought for high-leveled magic, the amount of gasoline was finite.

However, the certain creature had no such a limitation.

That certain creature had the ridiculous characteristic of immortality, meaning that they possessed infinite magic power. Even if the Earth’s resources were to eventually run dry, the magical power of the creatures would continue on.

Cain's descendants: the vampires.

They were, for certain, not the feeble creatures depicted in fiction that could be dealt with by a cross or sunlight. In fact, one was enough to initiate a nuclear-level global calamity.

"Hm." In the huge container, the still inverted stared with dullness at Stiyl. "Speaking of which, do you know what do we mean by esper powers?"

"...No." Stiyl could not possibly understand neither did he believe Aleister would tell him. It was because if the moment came that Stiyl knew the enemy’s secrets, he would no longer have the option to escape alive.

"In fact, esper powers are but a difference in perspective." Aleister spoke casually. "Have you heard of 'Schrödinger's Cat'? It is the most famous animal abuse case in the world."

"...?"

"I shall gloss over the details. Overall, it roughly experimented that 'reality is seen differently from human to human'. Of course, the micro and macro physical laws are different, so this cannot explain it all."

"The rules of this world can be seen as a microscopic (micro) and telescopic (macro). As for which were micros and which were macros, it was said that those were also within Aleister's range of research."

"...I don't really get what you mean."

"It is alright, there is no need for you to. If you did, I would have to kill you immediately." Aleister nonchalantly told him. "...Speaking of which, it is I who truly does not understand. Is there really a Deep Blood? And what is the difference? It is just like the cat in the box."

Aleister stated that espers changed the world like how litmus papers changed colors in different acidities.

The purpose was not to marvel at the change in color from red to blue but to wonder why it had changed and whether one could manipulate such a rule. Though Aleister controlled 2.3 million espers, they were not enough to declare on the entire world. Espers are not an aim but a means.

Stiyl trembled. The human before him truly believed that machines could replace all human actions.

To this human, which parts were mechanical?

To this human, which parts were human?

"That is right." The human spoke, the being that appeared like a man but somehow feminine, like an adult but somehow childlike, like a saint but somehow criminal formed an expression which could have been considered a smile and continued. "…If Deep Blood proves the existence of vampires, whose existence does Imagine Breaker prove?"

Part 2

In his heart, Kamijou Touma shouted: *What the heck!*

On the second floor of the fast food restaurant, a no-smoking zone was packed. At completely full four-seating table, Kamijou, Index and Aogami Pierce sat there.

Hm, it was okay up here but—

"—Spent all my money and ruined myself."

—why is there a miko in this crude shop lying on a table and saying such insanity?!

Her age was similar to that of Kamijou’s and her waist length her seem like a textbook example of a miko

"..."

"..."

The heavy presence was like they were in an elevator.

What should I do? Kamijou wondered.

At that moment, he noticed Index and Aogami Pierce staring at him.

"...Wha-What's up?"

"...Kami-yan, when someone talks to ya, ya should oblige and reply, right?"

"...That's right, that's right! Touma, you can't just back out after seeing the appearance. You must follow God's teachings and reach out, amen!"

"...Oi, are you kidding!? We should at least settle this by rock, paper, scissors to make it fair! Oi, Index! You think I’ll lose, huh!? Oi! Why’re you making a cross over your chest!?"

In the end, the trio had decided to play rock, paper, scissors to determine the martyr.

Rock, rock …and scissors. Kamijou lost. Overall, Kamijou Touma was simply unlucky.

"Erm, excuse me?"

Kamijou, the only one who chose scissors, in confusion, could only speak to the miko. Her shoulders jerked.

“Ah... Erm… What did you mean by spent all your money and ruined yourself?”

Well, it’s better to have a normal conversation, Kamijou thought. The miko did say it herself and was likely hoping for others to ask her why.

“As I had a lot of free coupons and a hamburger costs 580 yen (a. $7.04)—”

“Uh huh.” Kamijou, as a result of his amnesia, had forgotten how a hamburger tasted. However, he knew that hamburgers were simply a meat patty with rotten lettuce, an impoverished person’s vile friend.

"—I went ahead and ordered 30 of them."

"You ordered too many, stupid girl." As Kamijou retorted on reflex, he had noticed the miko was unmoving. Because of her silence, one could tell that she gave off an aura of emotional hurt.

It was an uncomfortable atmosphere. He had not expected for her to respond so seriously. Truly, the atmosphere was uncomfortable.

“Ah! I didn’t mean it like that! I didn’t finish! I actually wanted to say ‘stupid girl, why did you order so many?’ I just meant to make the conversation go smoothly. I might be blunt, but it’s a proof of my friendless, I don’t have bad intentions! OI! THE NUN AND BLUE-HAIRED DUDE OVER THERE, WHY ARE YOU STARING AT ME LIKE THAT ?!? JUST WAIT TILL WE TALK OUTSIDE!!”

Unable to withstand the pressure, Kamijou began to shout madly.

“Meal of frustration.”

The stationary miko that was approximately half-dead finally spoke.

"Ha?"

"Train fare back home: 400 yen."

Facing such suspicious words from the miko, Kamijou could only swallow his saliva. He had no memories of riding a train but he knew that riding a train or bus in Academy City was extremely pricey.

“What does 400 yen for a train ride have to do with a frustration meal?”

“My total fortune: 300 yen.”

“…And you’re telling me because?”

"Overspending… lack of planning..."

"..."

"…So I'm having a frustration meal."

Kamijou had barely managed to swallow the words “you idiot” that were rising from his throat.

After careful consideration, he spoke. “But, why don’t you use that 300 yen for the train ride? If you can’t pay for one, you can just walk the 100 yen difference. And if you can’t do that, why don’t you just borrow 100 yen from someone?”

"…That idea's good."

"Why are you staring at me like that? What’s with the expectant look?”

Kamijou frantically backed away from the miko as much as possible. He had already spent 3600 yen on a reference book (meaninglessly at that) and had even bought three shakes to calm down Index. So, even if it were 100 yen, it was a heavy burden to bear.

On that topic…

The miko, who had lifted her face up, was unexpectedly beautiful.

She was differed slightly from the foreign Index; she had skin as white as the Japanese that contrasted with her black hair and eyes. Though her eyes lacked emotion, they also lacked aggression. Even if she did not want someone around, she emanated a comforting feeling. It was an encompassing nature.

"..."

Index scowled and glared at Kamijou.

“Th-That’s impossible! Kami-yan’s actually talking to a gal… to actually be talking to a girl he just met, it’s impossible!” Aogami Pierce grumbled angrily, truly attempting to ruin Kamijou’s reputation.

"SHUT UP! YOU, TWO-DIMENSIONAL ALIEN! CLIENT, GET BACK TO THE BACK OF THE GYM LATER! AND, YOU MIKO, FIND A WAY TO GET 100 YEN BY YOURSELF AND GO HOME! TRANSMISSION COMPLETE!"

"What? It's not over yet Kami-yan! Ya were a good man for 16 years, how did ya get so many unique girls like a nun and a miko within 2 weeks!? Is this a gal game?" Aogami Pierce cried out in confusion and Kamijou truly desired to reward him with a punch. However, as they sat diagonally, he could not do so. Just examining the positions of their seats was enough to see how misfortunate Kamijou was.

"100 yen please." The miko lifted her head and stared with a complicatedly pained expression. She continued. “Will you lend to me?”

"Nope. No money here."

"..." The miko pondered for a while and spoke. "...So stingy. Won't even let me borrow a mere 100 yen."

"...Who's the idiot who doesn't even have a stupid 100 yen!?" Kamijou inadvertently retorted back.

"Kami-yan! How can ya respond like that so naturally!? As a good man, shouldn't ya stutter in front of a beauty!?" Aogami Pierce shouted out with a

Hellish voice.

"...Beauty." The miko's eyes waved, causing one to wonder what she was thinking about. "Lend me 100 yen since I'm beautiful."

"Shut up! You terrible woman! A woman who uses her looks to get money can't be called a beauty! And you know what? I just bought three shakes so I don't have any money left!"

"That's-That's great Kami-yan! Ya still think that a beauty's heart must be kind and pure, it seems like ya haven't left the 2-D world!"

"...Hold on Touma. You're saying that you'd give her 100 yen if you didn't help me buy shakes? Humph!"

The stares and cries of outrage began to surface and they far surpassed Kamijou's computing abilities. Kamijou grabbed his head, wondering which point he should settle first. At that point, Index, slurping the shake with a straw, was glaring at the miko with hostility.

“Humph. Seeing as you’re wearing red pants, I suppose you make divinations, right? So divining mikos will also sell their faces, right? I’ve even heard that the term ‘miko’ was a secretive way of calling someone a ‘whore’ in the Heian period, right?”

Kamijou jumped and shouted at the words while Aogami Pierce’s voice raised pitch for some unknown reason shouting, “Hahaha, a nun and miko are going at it!”

As Kamijou prepared to force Aogami Pierce to remain silent, the miko spoke. “I’m not a miko.”

“What?”

The black-haired girl who looked exactly like a miko, whose picture could have been used in an encyclopedia entry on mikos, caused the present company to stare at her.

“Eh… If you’re not a miko, what are you?” Kamijou asked, having somehow become the group’s representative.

"I'm a spell caster."

"..."

Completely silent. The sounds of the shop’s cable broadcast seemed distant. For some reason, despite his amnesia, Kamijou felt that he had experienced it before. But, of more importance, why was Index trembling? Kamijou cried in his heart.

BAM! Index slammed the table with both hands. Before the shakes on the tray could even jump up, Index roared. "What kind of spell caster? Kabbalah? Knoch? Hermes? McCue's idol or Modern Astrology? Don't just give us something that vague and tell us your specialty, school, magic name and order name, idiot!"

"???"

"You dare to call yourself this even without knowing all of these? Since you're a divination miko, you should at least pretend to be an oriental-style astrologist or

something!"

"Alright. I'll be that."

"You'll ‘be that’!? Did you really just say that!?!"

Index continued to slam her hands and Kamijou sighed while he looked around him. Though the shop was rather noisy, Index’s flailing was too much. He had to quiet her soon.

“Alright. Alright. We understand that this miko isn’t a miko but a spell caster. But so what? Calm down.”

“Touma! Your attitude is completely different from when you first met me!”

Index glared at Kamijou as if to bite him but the reality was that Kamijou had truly forgotten. Of course, simply telling her “sorry, I lost my memories” was not an option.

“If she thinks she’s a spell caster, leave her be. Since she’s not trying to harm or trick anyone, ignore it.”

“…Uu. When I wanted to prove that magic was real, my clothes were stripped.”

“Ha?”

“Nothing! I said and thought about nothing!” Index angrily looked away and, underneath the table, Kamijou’s foot was repeatedly stomped. It seemed there could have been only one culprit

“Ah.” Index, who had turned her head aside, seemed to notice something.

Kamijou wondered whether the shop attendants would chase them out for their riotousness.

At that moment, *Nh… people?*

As he felt that something was amiss, Kamijou realized that the table the four of them sat at was surrounded by about ten people.

"…"

Why didn't we notice? Kamijou wondered.

It was perhaps the same distance as the space between customers and attendants waiting for orders. The group of ten looked over in that direction, seemingly desiring to surround the table. It was incredible that no one had noticed.

Also, though shop was crowded, no one had noticed the anomaly. Essentially, these individuals could erase their presences like professional assassins.

"…"

All of them, in their 20s and 30s, were dressed in the same Western suit

If they were squeezed together in a train station, they could cause those around them to not remember their faces and names. However, their expressions lacked emotions completely. And, because of that, they contrasted from their surroundings.

Emotionless expressions…?

Kamijou wondered where had seen the expression before and looked back around the table.

…The anonymous miko…

Her expression was still deadpan even with ten men surrounding the teenagers.

“100 yen more.” She spoke as she silently stood. Her attitude was as casual as meeting someone for a planned arrangement, showing her unwariness of them.

One of them backed away and made a path while another respectfully handed over a 100 yen coin to the palm of the miko without a word.

“Eh? Ah? So you know these people?” Oblivious of the situation, Kamijou spoke.

"..." She looked around herself, seemingly pondering something. “Nn. They’re cram school teachers.”

A nonchalant tone. The miko walked down to the first floor and the ten men

silently followed behind like bodyguards or even shadows.

The familiar buzzing and wired music seemed far away as the volume softened. When everyone had left, Aogami Pierce finally spoke. “Hold on, why did cram school teachers bring her back? They’re not elementary school disciplinary officers.”

Part 3

Later, it was evening.

In order to erase the memory of the mysterious miko and the suit-clad men, Kamijou and company played energetically and dispersed home after 5:00 like elementary school students afterschool.

Aogami Pierce said “bye-bye” like an elementary school child and disappeared into the evening streets. He lived in a bakery instead of a student dormitory. It was said that he stayed there because the uniform looked like a maid outfit.

On the road in front of the department store station, Kamijou and Index were alone.

Kamijou sighed. As the idea that they were alone appeared in his mind, a numbing tension spread through his body. There was no need to mention why.

“What’s the matter Touma?”

Facing a question with such an innocent smile, he could only answer that it was nothing. He carefully maneuvered to avoid being found out and sighed. It was because they lived together. On top of that, secretly, in a “boys’ dorm”. Most important of all, she was such a little girl.

It was several days since he had returned from the hospital. And, every day, she slept beside Kamijou as if it were normal. Also, her sleeping habits were terrible; perhaps it was because of her dislike of the heat that she would reveal her feet or

bellybutton from her pajamas. All said and done, he could only choose to lock himself in the bathroom and, because of it, Kamijou Touma was recently sleep deprived.

“…Am I so bad I could end up on the tabloids?” He muttered. How would the Kamijou Touma with his memories have viewed the situation? He continued to mutter. In fact, the concept of “living together” was proposed by the Kamijou with his memories.

What were you doing, Kamijou of the past! He roared in his heart.

Walking half the distance, Index suddenly stopped, seemingly having seen something.

“Eh?” Feeling depressed, Kamijou stared where Index’s gaze was directed. At the base of a windmill turbine sat a corrugated paper box with a cat purring inside.

"Touma! Ca—”

"No way!" Kamijou interrupted Index before she could finish. "No. We can't."

"Why why why why why? Why can't we raise Sphinx?"

"Because we're not allowed to have pets in student dormitories, and I don't have any money. And don't go ahead and name the cat so quickly! And what? Sphinx? THAT'S A JAPANESE CALICO CAT, WHY A FOREIGN NAME?"

"**Why don't you keep a cat! Do as you are told!**" (Note: This was spoken in English)

"???"

"...Humph! Don't think a few English words can convince me!"

"I DON'T CARE! WANNA WANNA WANNA WANNA WANNA WANNA WANNA WANNA!!!"

"WHAT'S WITH THIS SHOUTING ATTACK!? IT'S USELESS AGAINST ME! AND LOOK, YOUR CAT RAN INTO THE ALLEY!"

"IT'S ALL TOUMA'S FAULT!”

“AND YOU'RE BLAMING ME!?!"

In the summer sunset, the two shouted at each other. Kamijou casually thought *how did the Kamijou Touma then treat her? Maybe it was like this?*

If it were the case, it would be great for him. But… it was somewhat lonely. After all, the girl was not looking at this Kamijou. What made her completely at ease was the Kamijou of old.

It was painful… But, Kamijou still intended to struggle on.

“Humph! I heard that the Shamisen was made from cat skins? Why must the people of this country always be so cruel to cats?”

“…Idiot, don’t criticize other countries’ cultures! You English folks also love to gather together and chase down foxes, right!?”

“WHAT DID YOU SAY?! FOX HUNTING IS REPRESENTATIVE OF ENGLISH TRADITION AND PRIDE—!”

Halfway finished shouting, Index noticed something and moved away.

“Na? What? Where did the cat disappear to?” Kamijou said as he looked around, but did not see any sign of the cat.

"...That's strange. Touma. I seem to sense that mana is being gathered." Index stared at Kamijou and muttered.

"...The attribute is earth, color is green. This ritual... uses a medium to introduce mana and acts through conscious intervention..."

She seemed to mutter her thoughts. Kamijou knew not what she spoke of and only stared at her. As he did so, she finally spoke.

“Oi, Index!”

“It looks like someone just set up a magical array around here. I’ll go check it, go home first, Touma!” Just like that, Index vanished into the alley.

"She told me to go back, but…" *Quite the mysterious girl*, he thought. Regardless, he could not simply leave her behind and leave first. *Anyways, a girl just ran down a dangerous alley. The chances of encountering something bad is as high in a third rate RPG's storyline.*

Misfortune reared its head again and Kamijou sighed. He raised his foot to follow her into the alley. But, at the same instant, a voice came from behind him.

"It's been a while, Kamijou Touma." His foot, about to step into the alley, stopped.

The words "It's been a while" were essential taboo for Kamijou. He remembered information like the Japanese language or first grade mathematics but he had no memories. He remembered nothing, not even the trivial from when he bought a game to the important like how he scored on his end-of term exams. As he could not remember names and faces, hearing something like "It's been a while" caused him to only give his most sincere false smile.

It was to protect her happiness. He had decided he must never let others realize his amnesia. With such a conviction, he turned to look behind him.

"Ah." Seeing the man standing there, Kamijou had no impressions. He was more of a teenager than a man but for a man over two meters tall, the term teenager could have been a stretch. He wore a black priest's robe and, like Index, he lacked the pale white skin of the Japanese.

Though he was a priest, the smell of cologne was overwhelming. His long hair was dyed red, his ears were pierced, every one of his fingers was decorated by rings and under his right eye was a barcode tattoo. This fallen impression he gave was like that of a renegade monk or even a heretic.

How could such a thing exist? And, he did not desire to leave any impressions.

"Humph. Not even a 'hello' even though we haven't met for a while? Hm, that's fine too. That's how our relationship should be. We can't just act like comrades after working together once." The cologne priest spoke earnestly.

Who is this guy… Kamijou could not voice this.

Besides the existence of such a suspicious priest, Kamijou was even more

suspiciously curious why he had known such a person. Additionally, one more thing bothered him. Index had run off somewhere and there was little time to bother with the dark priest.

"Ah, don't worry about Index, I just used Opila runes. She probably just detected the magic flow and went to take a look."

Kamijou was stunned.

Runic magic: a magical language that the Germanic people adopted in the 2nd century A.D. Essentially, they were “words of power” such as “kenaz,” flames. With “kenaz” on paper, flames would form over.

...*What’s going on?* He could not voice his concerns. Rather than the priest’s speaking of runic magic, it was because such ridiculous knowledge flowed naturally from Kamijou’s mind.

It was certainly abnormal. It was like running a rusted locomotive into the middle of a clear river, like a large gaping hole in a logical world. It had mixed into a world where green meant go and text messages cost money. The thing called magic had weaved into everyday life.

What kind of world did the Kamijou Touma of the past live in?

For the first time, Kamijou feared his past self.

The scented priest seemed to see something in Kamijou’s eyes and closed one eye and smiled. Kamijou knew not what was going on and neither was he in the mood to speak to others. He could only ambiguously smile and suppress the nebulous feeling.

As Kamijou smiled, the red-haired priest pulled out what appeared to be a card and spoke. “Don’t smile with everything. Are you ready to die?” (English) He smiled like melting wax, the face extending sideways.

A chill. The knowledge that Kamijou still had told him that there was danger. Without time to think, he raised his right hand.

Quickly raising his right hand before his own eyes, as if he were blocking light shining into eyes, and, at the same instant, the priest’s right hand burst out

flames. As if he were hosing out gasoline, a fiery-red sword of flames formed.

There was no delay. No hesitation, no mercy—the sword was swung great force, downwards at Kamijou. The instant the sword and hand came in contact, the former exploded like a ball of gas the flames scattered.

The flames absorbed oxygen and released a terrifying sound as a 3000 degree flaming Hell formed a vortex that invaded all nearby. With a boom, the flames did not completely stop. It shined but, without a moment's notice, vanished as if broken.

"Ha... hah..." Kamijou did not lower in a panic his right hand that protected his face. He continued to breathe heavily.

Imagine Breaker: the mysterious power hidden in Kamijou's right hand. No matter what the super natural power, even one of God's miracles, would vanish completely on contact.

"Hah... hah...!"

Seeing the stiff, trembling and immobile Kamijou, the priest finally smiled. "Yes. Yes. That's the face I want. The relationship between Kamijou Touma and Stiyl Magnus should be like this. Don't make me repeat myself: our relationship isn't such that could call each other comrade after working together once."

The priest's smile ruptured and melted. Kamijou, on the other hand, could not respond. It was not that he feared the abnormal power within him, neither did he fear the priest called Stiyl Magnus. If it were a question of fears, there was but one issue.

What bothered him was that he could actually respond in time to block the attack, a flame sword at that without a thought. In other words, his knowledge feared him.

It was truly frightening.

"Wha... are you—" Kamijou frantically took two, three steps because the knowledge leftover from the previous Kamijou Touma was telling him that an enemy was there.

There was no time for him to fight the enemy within. As of then, the most important issue was the enemy without. Perhaps, as a result of the knowledge imprinted in his mind, Kamijou growled and entered a fighting stance of no particular style. He was in fact quite surprised he was accustomed to fighting.

Facing Kamijou, the pseudo-priest magician chuckled. “Hn? I want to tell you a little secret.”

What nonsense are you spouting? As Kamijou thought as such, Stiyl extracted an envelope.

It seemed like it contained much information. *Is he really going to tell me some secrets?* Kamijou frowned. *This guy just made a huge explosion on this one direction, 3-lane road as wide as a runway. Now he’s trying to tell me a secret...?*

...?

Considering it, Kamijou realized something. There was a large explosion and yet the surroundings were not involved in the commotion.

...!?

No. It was then that Kamijou realized the truth. Rather than a lack of commotion, there was a lack of people. On the said road as wide as a runway, there were department stores lined up on either side. But, giving it thought, there were no people, no cars, only Kamijou and Stiyl.

The windmill turbines rattled, causing echoes through the empty street like a laughing skeleton. From far away, the ringing of a siren was heard in the empty crossing.

"I said it before," Perhaps to break the silence of the night cost, Stiyl chuckled. “I used Opila runes.”

“Ehwaz.” Stiyl said and flicked the large fan-mail like envelope with his index finger. It spun like a Frisbee and slowly landed in Kamijou’s hands. There were mysterious words on it that seemed to seal the documents inside. As Stiyl muttered, the words began to glow. The seal opened down the middle as if cut by a knife.

"Have you heard of Misawa Cram School, the prep school?" Stiyl asked as if singing. A large amount of information appeared on every scrap of paper and, like a magic carpet, only the necessary information flew out of the envelope and floated around Kamijou.

Lacking memories, Kamijou could only scan the name through his own knowledge. However, he still had no impression of the name Misawa. It had seemed his past self lacked interest in college entrance exams.

“It’s said to be the prep school with the largest market in the nation.” Stiyl spoke with melancholy. A prep school, as the name may have implied, that was tuition based. Repeat students who failed their college entrance exams gathered there to study.

However, the “promotion prep class” in Academy City has another meaning. It was to provide to those individuals who already had the potential to enter college but chose to spend a year to study.

A piece of paper floated in front of Kamijou. It seemed that Misawa Cram School provided not only “promotion classes” but “pre-exam express” services to those students yet to take an exam.

"...So, why are you telling me about prep classes? Is there a discount offered when you introduce it to friends?" Kamijou asked Stiyl with an obvious look of distrust. Kamijou could not imagine any sort of relationship the cologne reeking priest had with a preparatory school.

“It’s like this,” Stiyl nonchalantly began. “A girl is imprisoned in Misawa and it’s my job to save her.”

Completely stunned, Kamijou stared at Stiyl. Instead of the frightening word “imprisoned”, it was because he suspected that the man was serious. Of course, even if Stiyl were mad, it was nothing to Kamijou. However, as the man could use flames like weapons, it would have been dangerous for him to go berserk.

“Hm, I thought that you would understand if I showed you the information.” Stiyl lifted his index finger up and the envelope in Kamijou’s hands released printing paper that continued to fly around Kamijou like snowflakes. One particular piece was a positional diagram of Misawa Cram School.

However, the picture of the diagram contained errors in regards to the measures when one compared the infrared and ultrasonic scans. Naturally, it was an unknown place that consumed much electricity.

A Misawa Cram School electricity bill… Even after investigating the electrical consumption of each room, the sum did not tally up. There seemed to have been a room where “something” was consuming large sums of electricity.

A personnel entry and exit list of Misawa Cram School… The teachers and students seemed to take in a myriad of foods. Some investigators acted as garbage men and checked the trash but the numbers there did not tally either. Misawa seemed to provide food for other “people” inside the building.

The final sheet of paper… was a reported sighting one month prior of a girl walking into the Misawa building. According to a caretaker of the student dormitory, the girl was never again seen at the dorms.

“As of now, it would seem that Misawa Cram School has become a phony religious cult devoted to scientific worship.” Stiyl said smoothly.

Scientific worship...? Kamijou frowned in surprise.

"You're, talking about those things, right? Gimmicks like how God's real identity is that of a UFO or with an extraction of a Saint's DNA, they could make clones, right...?"

The concept that science and religion are unrelated was rather shallow. In the Western world, there were many doctors and scientists who were also Christians.

However, if such a relationship were forced, it was fact that atrocities would occur. It was common for those individuals to have the most advanced technology in producing explosives and poisonous gases.

Academy City, the leading entity of scientific technology and coincidentally learning and education, would normally act extremely carefully when dealing with science and religion mixing. The places whose purposes were educational could become brainwashing institutions.

“I don’t know what they’re teaching. But, to be honest, it’s pointless no matter what kind of fanatical religious group that Misawa Cram School becomes

because it’s already been dissolved.”

“…?”

“To put it more bluntly…” Stiyl continued, appearing to have not a care at all. “Misawa Cram School was taken over. The half-baked science phony-religious group was consumed by a real magician—no, an alchemist of the Zurich school to be precise.”

"An authentic one...?"

"Yeah, I know it sounds suspicious... hold on."

"What?"

"...Since when were you so docile? Are you just listening to me and letting the words come out the other end? Did you not understand at all?”

Kamijou was shocked. Stiyl was incorrect. He was truly listening to Stiyl and was trying to understand and respond to the unfamiliar terms. But, it was because of that that Stiyl felt something was amiss.

It was like someone had realized that the Kamijou Touma of now was different from the Kamijou Touma of the past.

Don’t realize it. Don’t realize it…!

The Kamijou of the present did not know the magician’s relationship with Index. But, no matter how distant they may have been, Kamijou did not want others to know about his amnesia.

Kamijou saw it. In the patient’s room, he saw the white nun’s habit wearing girl cry. The tears of happiness were shed for the boy that was the Kamijou with his memories. He could not topple her mental support… ever. So, Kamijou had decided to fool the entire world. Even himself.

“What, are you giving me this crap just because I’m listening attentively? You aren’t a masochist are you? You the type that wants others to interrupt what you say all the time?”

But, of that moment, Kamijou did not know how different he acted from the previous Kamijou. It was like walking with a map. Even if he knew he was going the wrong direction, looking around and finding desert everywhere would not tell him the correct path to take.

For a time, Stiyl stared with suspicion at his face. “Fine, whatever. It’s not a problem that this conversation’s going well anyways.” Stiyl finally ended his digression. “The point is the reason why the alchemist took over Misawa Cram School. Of course, the simple reason is that he probably feels it convenient to use Misawa as a base. Most of the students may not have realized that the principal of the prep school has changed.”

Stiyl lightly exhaled and continued. “The most important reason why is because Deep Blood is imprisoned in Misawa Cram.”

Deep Blood?

Kamijou had never heard of the name before and neither did he possess any knowledge of it. However, the name itself already sounded terrifying.

“Originally, Misawa Cram seemed like they imprisoned her to be a miko. In actuality, their idea wasn’t wrong. It’s a viable method to use a miko as a sacrifice to summon higher class beings.”

“...”

“But Deep Blood was already a target for the alchemist. Misawa Cram had simply taken her first. No, perhaps for him, it couldn’t have been helped. His original plan should have been to abduct Deep Blood without any notice and proceed to escape Academy City. However, because Misawa blew it out of proportion, his plans was ruined.”

“So… he forcefully took what he wanted from Misawa?”

He was like a master thief who formulated various preparations to steal something from an art gallery only to find terrorists occupying the building. The thief then would proceed to steal the painting he desired from the destructive maniacs who did not understand the value of the artwork and then finds police flooding the gallery.

Unable to do a thing, the master thief would build a barricade at the entrance and hide inside.

“Yeah. For the alchemist, it’s his greatest wish to be able to get Deep Blood… or, more accurately it’s the wish of for the entirety of magicians. Or maybe even the wish of the entire world.”

“???” Kamijou appeared puzzled.

“It’s an ability that kills a ‘certain creature.’ No, not only that. It offers the only possibility of capturing the creature alive to prove it exists.” Kamijou still did not understand. “Well, if I have to use Christian terminology, this creature is called Cain’s descendant.”

Stiyl chuckled and spoke in a whisper. “Basically, they’re vampires.” He had finally said it.

“Are you kidding me?” Upon hearing such a word, it was Kamijou’s first response. Vampires… Kamijou did not know where the legend originated from but, according to the depictions in games and manga: vampires fear crosses and sunlight, vampires die when hammered with a stake, vampires reduce to dust upon death, and those bitten by vampires become vampires.

He only knew those facts. And, for some reason, the information that Kamijou knew were from mangas and games (and fighting games at that). In reality, the Cross was useless.

“…Those that can consider it a joke are considered lucky.” Stiyl gnashed his teeth and looked away. As of then, the adept flame manipulator magician seemed to fear something. “Humph. If there’s a specialist that can kill vampires, it’s obvious that the vampires to be killed must exist too. It’s like how villains exist for the sakes of the heroes of justice. It’s a vicious cycle. But, one thing I can confirm is that… well, if possible I don’t want to admit it.”

“...What do you mean? Do these fictional vampires actually exist?” Kamijou was still denying it in his heart.

But, the man before him was as stern as ever, unable to brush it off.

“Nobody has ever seen a vampire—“ Stiyl Magnus seemed like the embodiment

of self confidence as he continued in a chant-like tone. “—because everyone who did, died.”

“...”

“Of course, I’m not going to just believe it so easily. The troublesome thing is that no one has seen a vampire before but Deep Blood’s very existence proves vampires’ existences. Nobody knows how strong they are, how many there are, where they are… No one knows, no one knows, no one knows… How can we deal with something we know nothing about?”

Stiyl continued to rant on but Kamijou, who still had not accepted the term vampire, could understand nothing. In the end, he could only think that they were dealing with hidden terrorists all over the world.

“But on the other hand, it's because no one knows about the truth behind them that there're all sorts of unknown possibility.” Stiyl sneered cynically.

“Kamijou Touma, have you heard of the 'Kabbalah?'… I suppose you haven't, right?”

“...Do you think you’ll hurt my pride like that?”

“Whatever. Anyways, the 'Kabbalah' represents the 'soul level' of God: angels, humans, et cetera. Simply put, humans can climb the ranks with training. But, at some point, they’ll hit a wall they can’t climb.”

“...You're treating me like an idiot, aren't you? What are you trying to say?”

“Is your pride hurt? What I'm trying to say is… there are some disciplines that humans can't reach no matter how much they try. But, humans do want to continue their ascent no matter what. Magicians became magicians because they want to surpass human limits. If so, what must humans do to surpass this limit?” His expression seemed like he would rip his sneer apart. “It’s simple. They just need to borrow the power from something that isn’t human.” Kamijou could not speak.

“So-called vampires are immortal. You could rip their hearts out or stab them with a magic sword and they can continue to live like a magic tool.” Stiyl easily continued. “The authenticity is unimportant. Scholars are those who would try

anything with even just a tiny possibility.”

In other words, whether the vampires existed was irrelevant. What was important was that some believed that they did and raised issues over it. If someone blew something up, another would have to deal with it. This was the situational crux.

“So... no one knows if vampires exist or not, right?”

It was a common occurrence to find a number of people fighting in action movies over some ancient treasure whose existence was questionable. However, it was ridiculous for such a thing to occur in real life.

“Confirming such an unknown existence is our job.” Stiyl chuckled cynically. “Thus, Misawa Cram and the alchemist were serious. They really wanted to face off against a vampire and needed the ace called Deep Blood.”

“…”

“Oh yeah. Do you know about Deep Blood’s past? It’s rumored that the girl used to live in a mountain village in Kyoto. But, one day, everyone in the village died. The last villager who reported on the case might’ve been in a state of disarray, fearing a monster would kill him. When the rescue arrived, all they found was an empty village caked in a white snow-like ash and a girl, absent mindedly standing there.”

Ashes… It was rumored that vampires turned to ashes upon death.

“It's true that vampires are an unknown sort of existence. Deep Blood is a power that can 'kill vampires'. But if, Deep Blood wanted to kill vampires, Deep Blood has to meet vampires. As for those who want to find vampires no matter the cost, the easiest way is to catch Deep Blood. However, since Deep Blood is powerful enough to kill even vampires, how can they subdue Deep Blood? That’s the question.”

It was a completely supernatural discussion.

Kamijou’s instinct told him it was dangerous to listen in. If he continued to listen, his common senses would become twisted. Kamijou had a premonition that, if it kept up, it may turn into an irreversible situation.

To end the conversation, Kamijou explicitly raised a suspicion. “Alright. You’ve told me these secrets. What do you want to say now?”

“Nn. That’s right. We’re short on time so let’s end this quickly.” Stiyl nodded twice and continued. “…Basically, I have to charge into Misawa Cram and save Deep Blood.”

Kamijou nodded in response.

“Don’t nod away like that. You’re going with me.”

…

“What? What did you just say?”

“That was an accurate description of the situation. Also, the conversation was a discussion of our battle plan. Do you still remember everything? The papers are engraved with flame runes and are due to burn up after you see them. It’ll be bad if you forget.”

“Hold...!”

ARE YOU KIDDING ME!? Kamijou thought.

The person before him named Stiyl whose power was most suited for killing was merciless. If he was entering some enemy alchemist’s stronghold, it would be unsurprising to see him tangled in a dangerous development.

“Also… one more thing.” Stiyl continued. “I believe you don’t have the right to refuse. If you disobey, we’ll take away Index from you.”

For some reason, the words carved deeply into Kamijou. His past “knowledge” was afraid. The remnants of the past Kamijou seemed to fear something.

“The mission that Necessarius gave you is for you to act as a shackle. You are a shackle that’s preventing the chained Index from betraying the organization. But, if you don’t do as the Church wishes, you aren’t functioning as a shackle.” Stiyl sighed. “Speaking of which, it’d be good for me if you Church felt you were useless. I’d really thank you if you could do it. Since broken shackles are useless, I could just take that child back.”

It was a threat. If he disobeyed, Index would be taken away.

"..."

He was trembling. His heart was beating as if a wooden stake were being hammered in. Kamijou Touma had no memories and the one the girl met was the previous Kamijou Touma. It no longer had anything to do with him. The reason for his rapid heartbeat was likely because of the remnants of the last Kamijou.

But… for some reason,

"...Are you serious?"

Why did he believe with such conviction that his anxiety was a correct response?

Kamijou wondered.

It was true that Index had first met Kamijou when he had his memories and the trusts and smiles she had were not directed at the current him. Even so, it was alright. He had once seen the girl in the white room cry as she saw a battered and fatigued Kamijou.

In order to prevent her tears… Even if he had to deceive the entire world, even himself, it was alright. Kamijou swore to adhere to his own lies!

"...Humph." Stiyl detachedly looked away. His expression was the inexplicable one of an actor whose role was stolen. "If you want to settle things with me, wait till we deal with the alchemist hidden within Misawa Cram. Also, I forgot to mention, Deep Blood's name is Himegami Aisa. Here's a photo. It's best you take a look. It'd be bad if you didn't know the face of the person you're going to save."

A photo slipped out of the envelope, one that seemed powered by Stiyl's runes as well as it danced in the air and stopped in front of Kamijou.

Kamijou looked at the photo… *What does the esper with this terrifying Deep Blood look like?*

But, in the photo, he saw the face of the girl from the restaurant.

“Eh...?” Kamijou froze.

Perhaps the photo on a student report book or some I.D. card was enlarged because the face of Himegami Aisa was the same as the miko’s.

Kamijou recalled Stiyl’s words.

Originally, Misawa Cram seemed like they imprisoned her to be a miko.

He recalled the girl’s previous words.

…I'm not a miko.

Then the magician’s.

…A girl is imprisoned in Misawa and it’s my job to save her.

Himegami Aisa’s.

…They’re cram school teachers.

But why? He wondered. *According to Stiyl's explanation, Himegami Aisa was imprisoned in Misawa Cram. IF the miko's really Deep Blood, how can she enter a fast food restaurant to eat hamburgers?*

…Train fare back home: 400 yen.

Did she escape? Kamijou considered. The only possible reason why the imprisoned Himegami Aisa would be outside was because she had escaped Misawa.

…My total fortune: 300 yen.

If that were the case, it explained why she had so little cash with her. Besides, if she had escaped without much money, she’d have less if she took trains and buses.

But, why was she at a fast food restaurant? He wondered. *Since she escaped, how was she there?*

…Spent all my money and ruined myself.

“Ah!” Suddenly, Kamijou finally remembered what she had said. What if she couldn’t run any further because she ran out of funds? It’s because she couldn’t go any further?

And so, the girl had one final wish? The girl needed 100 yen. If she had 100 yen, could she have escaped Misawa Cram School? Who was the idiot who refused her?

…Spent all my money and ruined myself.

“Damn it...”

Additionally, Himegami conceded when she was surrounded by the cram school teachers. Obviously, she must have desired to resist. How could she be willing to return after escaping Misawa Cram School?

Any other person would have chosen to run. If escaping on her own were impossible, then she would have asked others for help. But, asking another would involve end up involving them.

“Damn it…!” Extremely unhappy about the circumstances, he was so frustrated he could not think. He was in outrage that Misawa Cram treated the girl as nonhuman and imprisoned her. He was revolting against the alchemist that snatched her and was infuriated by Stiyl who claimed that Deep Blood was the ace, the vampire deterrent.

But, the one thing that vexed Kamijou the most was the fact that Himegami Aisa had sacrificed herself for Kamijou’s sake.

It was wrong. If Kamijou had handed over 100 yen, he could have changed her fate. However, the girl was actually willing to sacrifice her efforts in escaping Misawa to save the boy who returned her to despair. It was fundamentally wrong.

Though Kamijou did not know what type of “new religion” it was, he could not imagine how a captive girl would be treated. Naturally, he did not want to imagine at all.

Kamijou was supposed to adopt the pain.

On what grounds can you even… Kamijou bit his lips and the taste of blood was felt on his canines. *TAKE AWAY ANOTHER PERSON'S MISFORTUNE!?!*

In reality, this was the root of Kamijou's frustration, a fact that made his mind boil.

Kamijou lacked memories. However, Himegami considered her treatment as a tool as acceptable. She ignored her own pains to help others and thought it a form of happiness.

In the past, Kamijou felt he had met such a girl before. Why was the memory absent? Kamijou vexed himself.

He had to save her?

What should he have said? Kamijou Touma was going to be unable to relieve his angers unless he punched the selfish and stubborn Himegami Aisa.

Between the Lines 1

…The girl stood in the center of a sea of ashes…

One of the 13 Knight Squads of England, the 1st Lancer Squadron, was assigned the mission of "gathering enemy information before any others."

That time, the enemy territory was a mountain village located in Kyoto. They had to decipher why the mana flow had become abnormally large and eliminate any threats. Thus was their aim.

…It had been over six hours since they had lost contact with the village…

…It had been over three hours since the investigating police had disappeared…

As every member of the squad could have guessed, the village was in ruins. It was not a rare occurrence for them. England had the British Museum which was known as the Arsenal. That bloody altar contained spiritual treasures stolen from

all over the world.

Compared to the raging soul of some ancient emperor residing in age-old treasure, the mission was riskless.

In fact, they were only equipped with cast armor and cross-shaped spears that were not mass-produced holy spears. Though the cast armor were simply defenses possessing magical power that increased the bearer's mobility by 20-fold, they were still first class spiritual items that their superiors saw as more than enough.

But, there was one thing that everyone was mindful of. The last survivor who had called had said something along the lines of "Help… me—that's not human… that's—"

Of course, nobody had believed him. The church superiors did not believe it and had not afforded the knights proper equipment.

But, the battle-hardened Knights of England felt some irritating sensation.

Though many records existed in the British Library, none had actually seen it before let alone capture one. As this creature seemed to somehow exist, it was a mystery as to why so many refused to admit they existed.

If they admitted that the certain creatures existed, the world would have been destroyed.

The terrifying fact about them was not the power they wielded. If the power were unmatchable, humans could always improvise with something besides brute force, such as tools and weapons to succeed.

The terrifying fact about them was not their immortality. If they could not kill the enemy, they could use other means for victory. For example, they could freeze them beneath the Antarctic ice or cut up the immortal flesh into 200 pieces and place them in bottles.

These were not issues. The issue at hand was the rumored mana stores the certain creature possessed. Mana was the magic world's gasoline. It involved the refining of raw fuel like lifespan and lifeforce into something simpler to use. To humans, who from the very beginning had shortened lifespans, the power of the

mana depended on the adept or inept refining methods.

However, it was different for the creature.

In essence, their original fuel, lifespan and lifeforce, could not simply be compared to a human's. Or rather, more accurately, their lifeforce was infinite so of course, the amount of magic they could use was on a completely different level. How could a handgun with limited ammunition combat an unlimited missile raid?

Thus, the members of the company laughed at their insecurities but still could not rid them completely. Like that, they passed through the mountains and reached the age-forgotten village. As they encountered the scene, their hearts felt crushed.

Around, ash was everywhere.

The seemingly age-abandoned Eastern wasteland was caked by a layer of white ash. The roofs of the huts, the earth in the fields, and the narrow channels were covered in ash.

Were the ashes… the remains of the creature?

But, that was not the truly shocking part. If they were real corpses, the number of dead was not limited to 10 or 20. By looking at the amount of ash, the members of the squadron were in disbelief.

In the middle of it all, a girl stood.

Around 5 or 6 years old, she was an Eastern black-haired girl. But, seeing the cute face of hers, the knights specializing in the elimination of radicals could not stop their hearts from beating wildly.

Among that scene of dancing ash, where the remnants of the certain creature were present, the girl was unharmed.

The wind began to blow and the ashes rose.

The ash that covered the entire wasteland scattered about except the area around the girl, as if she were in a Holy Sanctuary. It was as if the dead ashes still feared

and avoided her presence.

“I…” The girl spoke. “…I… killed so many again.”

It was like she was describing her everyday life.

Chapter 2: The Witch-Hunter Moves Along With the Flames. *By_The_ Holy_Rood...*

Part 1

Kamijou stared at the expression of the girl named Index.

His knowledge was complaining. She possessed an eidetic memory and forgot nothing and because of this was capable of memorizing 103,000 grimoires.

However, this ability was at time a double edged sword: she also could not forget something she would want to forget. The meaningless memories from a three year old department store brochure to everyone's face during rush hour were ingrained in her mind, inerasable.

Magic was necessary to erase her memories every year. If the wiping were to not take place, an overwhelming burden on her brain would have killed her. But, as of then, she, beside Kamijou, gave carefree smiles.

According to her, the savior from her predicament was Kamijou himself. However, he could not remember what he had thought or what he had done.

Then, Kamijou began to think.

He had parted goodbyes with Stiyl and returned Index to the dorm. Next, Kamijou needed to return to the battlefield called Misawa Cram School. Of course, simply bringing Index along was unthinkable, making it preferable to not tell her about Misawa Cram at all.

Though, if he did not produce some reason to leave the house, she may have raised suspicions and perhaps even desire to go as well.

“Touma?”

His palms were sweaty. A precarious situation, he had to avoid allowing Index to go.

“I said… ‘Touma!’”

As such, what he had to do was obvious.

Kamijou, to hide his insecurities, launched a barrage of verbal assaults.

“I’M GOING OFF TO THAT SUPER HIGH-TECH PRIMARY CULTURE INSTITUTE! EH? YOU WANT TO GO TOO? I DON’T THINK SO! YOU’RE NOT GOOD WITH MACHINES AND CAN’T USE THE SUPER-MAGENETIC BRAIN DETECTOR! YOU’LL GET LOCKED IN BY THE DOOR’S AUTO-LOCK! SINCE IT’S A LEVEL 4 SAFETY LEVEL, IF THE SYSTEM DATABASE HAS NO DATA ON YOU, YOU’LL GET ELECTROCUTED! BIRI BIRI NEGATIVELY CHARGED IONS OF LIGHT!”

As expected, under bombardment by technobabble, Index’s head released steam. It was to be expected. Index, who lacked general knowledge of the modern world, was the type to double-take at a train station vending machine saying “welcome”.

“Then, I’ll let you know before I go. Dinner’s in the fridge. Just microwave it and you can eat it. Don’t put the spoon in the microwave or you’ll start a fire. And, don’t you dare open the freezer to cool yourself.”

“Eh? Ah, uu… I can’t really use the microwave.”

One might suspect how another could misuse a microwave oven. However, Index had once microwaved a convenience store bento’s sauce package, which exploded. She also attempted to heat up a half-boiled egg, which also exploded. It seemed that how she used the microwave oven was irrelevant, it would explode anyways. Perhaps she believed that using it was a confident way to cause an explosion.

…*Looks like she isn’t suspicious.* Kamijou analyzed.

He watched Index stare at the microwave oven with narrowed eyes, apparently

determined to succeed. He heaved a sigh of relief.

Then, Kamijou realized it.

“Oi! What’s hidden in your clothes? More like, your stomach!”

“Eh?” She froze. Then, she turned to Kamijou and spoke. “No-Nothing at all!? I swear to God that nuns don’t lie!”

The moment she finished, the abnormally large stomach let out a “Mi—”, cat’s cry.

“OII! SO MUCH FOR FAITH. YOU BROKE YOUR OATH! GET THAT CAT OUT OF YOUR CLOTHES’ STOMACH!”

Perhaps because of this discussion with Stiyl and his general nervousness that he did not notice. The cat was likely the reason that Index lagged so long in the alley rather than searching for the rune's source.

“Uu! To-Touma! This piece of clothing is called the Walking Church, right?”

“So what?”

“A church should unconditionally extend its hand to any lost sheet. So, I will protect Sphinx, lost in the streets. Amen.”

“…” Kamijou's lips felt somewhat numb. “...So, you mean you'll raise the cat inside your cloths, right? I get it! The cat-box sand and toilet will be shoved in your sleeves, right?”

"..."

"..."

"Whatever! I've decided that Sphinx will be protected by the Church!"

“Oi! To the person who thinks before she acts! At least consider the one being taken care o!”

“It's alright as long as I treat it as family!”

“I DON'T WANT TO BE TREATED A DAD BY THE CAT!”

Though he did not want to, Kamijou truly considered dumping the cat on the way to Misawa Cram School. Well… Actually, he did want to. But, if he did so, Index would seek the cat and follow Kamijou the entire way.

“IDIOT! TOUMA IS AN IDIOT! I'LL RAISE THIS CHILD!”

“…Say that when you earn money yourself.”

“Actually, Touma doesn't need to feel bad. I just said idiot out of frustration and I don't really think you're an idiot!”

"Are you speaking alien?" If Kamijou agreed to it, Index would follow his lead.

What can I say but… Such misfortune.

Kamijou sighed. Calculating the funds needed to raise the cat, it seemed necessary to reduce the number of meals each day. Why did Index choose that time to adopt a cat?

"… …Fine."

"Hm? Touma? What did you say?"

"… …Can't be helped. Let's adopt it."

It was fine. It seemed that those kinds of words caused Index to cry tears of joy, an expression of Index's worth seeing.

"Ahh! Father in Heaven! Your warm light of love has finally reached the heartless, cruel, cold-blooded and snake-eyed heart in Touma! Thank you for saving this stray cat's innocent soul; I won't forget this for the rest of my life."

Even as Kamijou Touma thought such things, he could not explain *something*.

Part 2

Upon leaving the dormitory room, he met Stiyl, whom he had parted goodbye to sometime previously. He was scattering card-like objects around the area.

"What are you doing?"

"Can't you tell? I'm placing a barrier here to build a temple." Stiyl said as he worked. "Before we leave for Misawa Cram, who knows who will come here with a stupid reason and kidnap Index? Even if we can only do so much, we can feel a little more optimistic if we leave Innocentius here. If something happens, it can help her buy time to escape."

Innocentius.

Though Kamijou lacked memories, his information database informed him that Innocentius was a humanoid, ultimate weapon consisting of 3000 Celsius flames with an automatic tracking ability. Its only weakness was—

“It can only be used in the boundary that has runes and will disappear if the runes are destroyed.”

“…I’ll tell you this,” Upon his words, Stiyl’s ears twitched. “I lost to you last time because of the location, not because I’m weaker than you. If you hadn’t set of the sprinklers…”

"Eh? Did we fight before?"

Kamijou, with only knowledge instead of memories, knew how to defeat Innocentius but knew not where the information came from.

“Ku… So you mean to say that that incident was too pointless to remember?” Apparently misunderstanding, Stiyl continued. “Then, fine. I won’t squabble with you over it. Once I’m done here, the boundary will be complete. And, we’ll be able to head to Misawa Cram… how troublesome. I have to set up a boundary to repel magicians but weak enough that that child won’t notice.”

Stiyl continued to mutter, seemingly quite happy. As such, Kamijou somewhat realized a fact.

“Do you like Index?”

“Eh? EH!?” Stiyl blushed as if his heart had stopped. “Wh-Wh-Wh-Why are you saying such ridiculous things all of a sudden?! She-She’s a target of protection, not for romance—!”

Kamijou chuckled and ended the conversation because he felt that if he delved deeper, he would dig his own grave. The main point was not whether the current Kamijou Touma liked Index or not but that the current Kamijou’s feelings must have been the same as the previous Kamijou.

The current him knew not how the pre-amnesia Kamijou Touma thought of Index or how the interactions went. If Kamijou were to say something contradictory, Stiyl would have realized his masquerade.

It’s like there’s two of “me”…

Kamijou sighed deeply in his heart. It was inaccurate to say there were two Kamijou’s. Kamijou felt that a false him invaded the real one’s body and assumed his personality, putting the current him in an awkward situation.

“Before we charge into Misawa Cram, let’s talk about our ‘enemy.’” Stiyl said, perhaps preventing Kamijou from questioning further. They exited the student dormitory to walk onto the night street. Kamijou listened to Stiyl speak.

“The enemy’s name is Aureolus Izzard.” He introduced the name. “Speaking of Aureolus, there’s a person you’d think of… hm? Are you shocked he’s so famous? Don’t worry, he’s just a descent and not as strong as the legend.”

"…Who is this Aureolus??"

"...Oh yeah, you don't know about the magic world. But, you have heard of Paracelsus, right?"

"???"

"Ku...! He's the most famous alchemist in the world!" Stiyl said impatiently.

“So… Is this guy really amazing?” Kamijou asked while walking down the evening streets.

The August sunset burned and the multitude of windows, windmills, turbines, everything, were dyed an orange-red. Kamijou thought it looked exactly like a faded photograph, perhaps assisted by the unrealistic aspects of their conversation.

“He shouldn’t be strong… But, what’s worrying is the fact he must have some ‘secret weapon’ to subjugate Deep Blood. The worst case scenario is one where he’s used Deep Blood to capture the certain creature.” Rather than Aureolus Izzard himself, Stiyl seemed to mind the creature.

However, Kamijou could not comprehend. Even if the conditions were unique, treating the enemy’s abilities as secondary was incomprehensible.

“Oi. That’s not right, is it? I don’t know how powerful vampires are but

shouldn’t our primary concern be the enemy leader? It’s like fighting in a fire. We’ll be hurt badly if we’re only concerned with the flames.”

“Hm? Oh, you don’t have to worry about it. Aureolus’ name may be familiar but his descendants aren’t as powerful as him. And, in the magic world, there’s no such thing as an alchemist.” Stiyl spoke nonchalantly. “Divination, alchemy, summoning… these sound like your world’s language, mathematics and history. Japanese language arts teachers wouldn’t try to abolish mathematics, right? This so-called-magic is the study of learning a part of everything and choosing a world most suited for the user.”

Stiyl also added that the reason Aureolus Izzard became an alchemist was because he was untalented at other roles.

“And, also, alchemy isn’t a refined knowledge.”

“…”

Though Stiyl stated all of these, Kamijou understood none of it. His knowledge was like a historical calendar. It was because, for Kamijou, alchemy was only a fraudulent gimmick widespread in the 16th century. The purpose of alchemy, to his knowledge, was to fool royalty with scams.

“Alchemy—especially of the late Zurich branch—can be said to be a sub-branch of the Hermes school. Normally speaking, the main purposes were to turn lead into gold, create an immortality elixir, and so on.” Stiyl sounded unmotivated, perhaps because it was out of his scope of expertise. “But, these were all experiments. They’re like what you’d call a scientist, always looking for ‘foundations’ or ‘rules’. Scientists don’t care about what they get from the test tube because it wasn’t their aim. The same theory applies here. Alchemists weren’t actually focused on creating something but pursuing knowledge.”

“…Is it like how Einstein was only researching the Theory of Relativity? The atomic bomb was just a by-product?” If one examined it from this angle, scientists were the arrogant type, never considering the effects their creations have on society.

“Yeah. But, besides researching the formula and principle, they have a final goal.” Stiyl paused. “…It’s like a simulation of the world within his brain.”

“…”

“If you can understand the all the laws of the world, you could imagine the world in your brain. Of course, if even a single law were to be wrong, the simulated world in the brain would be flawed.”

“…? What? What do you mean? Are you talking about abilities similar to esper powers?”

On the primitive islands of the South Pacific like Fiji and Melanesia it was said that: to be leader, one had to be able to predict the next day’s weather with just a glance up at the sky.

Though such weather forecast ability seemed esper-like, it was just a result of calculating wind currents, cloud shapes, temperatures and humidity’s in the brain. The island leaders never realized that their brains were calculating. Instead, they believed they “listened to the voice of the wind” to predict the weather.

Stiyl’s meaning was similar to such an example. While it was true that a leader’s mind had simulated the next day’s weather, the imaginary world would have been miles away from reality if there were the tiniest error in their supposedly-perfect formulas.

“…Hold on. What could an ability like that do? Are they trying to make some algorithm that predicts the future for them like a weather report?”

“No.” He responded easily. “What if they could bring something imaginary into the real world?”

It was a shocking declaration.

“For example, there are spells that involve ectoplasm and spells that use telesma to summon angels. In the magic world, it isn’t uncommon to see someone drag their brain’s thoughts into reality.” Stiyl folded his arms. “Thus, it’s important to have an ability that lets the brain accurately imagine the real world. Basically, with this power, they could operate the world. Any and all celestial beings or devils would bow before them.”

“…Oi… Oi…”

“Of course, it’s hard to do. The flow of the river, the clouds, the humans, the blood… there are an infinite number of laws in a world. If someone screwed something up, he wouldn’t create an accurate world. One distortion in the world is like a distorted pair of wings. Even if they’re summoned, they’d be vanquished.”

That’s like a computer’s processor. Kamijou rationalized. *No matter how perfect the process is, if someone forgets to input an extra line, there’ll be an error and the program won’t execute.*

“On the other hand, if he really somehow did it, wouldn’t no one be able to go against him? If he could alter the entire world, how could the world win?” Perhaps, deep within him, Kamijou refused to believe it.

He was right. Humans could not defeat “everything” in the world. It did not mean that gods or devils were strong or weak; it was not that. Instead, “everything” in the world also included the people living there, such as Kamijou himself.

The simplest example: a mysterious could make real anything it reflected. No matter how strong Kamijou was, if an opponent created an identical Kamijou, the battle between identical Kamijou’s would result in simultaneous deaths.

“I said it before, just relax. Alchemy isn’t a refined knowledge.” In contrast, Stiyl did not seem anxious. “Let me put it this way: If I wanted you to explain everything in the world, including every grain of sand on the beach or stars in the sky, how long would it take you?!? I don’t think you could finish in one… two hundred years?”

“That’s the situation. In reality, the incantations existed for a long time but the human life is so short no one finished chanting it.” Stiyl continued easily. “Though they tried all sorts of things like removing unnecessary parts to shorten it or breaking it up to allow each generation and descendant speak 10 lines and so on.”

Even under these cases, there was not a single case of success. A completed incantation would have lacked any excessive points. When each generation passed down the incantation, the incantations became gradually erroneous like a game of telephone.

“However…” Stiyl stopped there and seemed to finally show some hostility. “… If the alchemists were living things with no lifespan limits, they could recite and complete the very long incantation. Perhaps because of this, the certain creature is such a rather large threat to magicians.”

Maybe this is why the aim of the enemy is to get a vampire. Kamijou thought.

To scientists, it was painful when they knew an answer but did not know why.

If an alchemist’s body of flesh could not fulfill it, could they not just seek a creature that surpassed a human’s limits?

“It’s true that this alchemy is still pretty threatening. But, right now, Aureolus Izzard shouldn’t be able to do it. The most he can do now is create a few things and turn this Misawa Cram into a fortress and set up numerous traps to prevent outsiders from entering.”

“…?” Kamijou felt that something was off. *Why is Stiyl so confident?* “Oi. Do you know this Izzard guy?”

“Of course I do. We were from Church organizations after all.” Stiyl said smoothly. “I’m an Anglican and he’s a Roman Catholic… We did meet each other, though our sects differ. Though, of course, we aren’t friends.”

For Kamijou, it was difficult to associate the terms “Church” and “magician” together.

Necessarius’, the organization that Stiyl and Index were affiliated with, purpose was to consume magical knowledge and counter magicians. But, they were radicals among the radicals. Even if the Anglican Church possessed such an organization, would the Roman Catholic Church, a different sect, be similar?

Noticing Kamijou’s question, Stiyl frowned.

“Necessarius is an exception amongst exceptions. There can’t possibly be similar institutions.” Stiyl sighed. “But, even if we’re exceptions, his job as a Cancellarius was a unique example among unique. He basically wrote grimoires in place of the Church. Even thought they were grimoires, the purpose was the complete opposite. It was like a guide to teach things like ‘which lines in the Bible could be used to counter spells witches use.’”

Stiyl stretched his arm and shook it about. “Of course, it isn’t rare to see members of the Church write grimoires as guides. The ones Pope Honorius III and King James I wrote are really famous.”

“…I see. So that’s why you said Aureoulus Izzard’s power isn’t really that much.”

“That's right. He might be knowledgeable about these things, but he can't fight. He’s like a quiet social club member that isn’t in a sports club. However, he's still a tough opponent. It’s because he's one of the few Cancellarius of the Roman Catholic Church and possessed much influence. The Roman Catholic Church is planning to determinedly fight him and punish him as a ‘heretic.’”

“No, that’s not what I meant. I’m saying that Aureolus is a name worth mentioning with the top religious people and kings, right? Are you jealous of him?”

“…I can consider that a taunt, right?”

“I’m up for it if you want to fight but don’t mistake me as an enemy right now.” Kamijou stared forward. “We’ve arrived at the battlefield.”

The pair stopped. Under the seemingly flaming sunset, the building awaited them.

Part 3

"I gotta say…" Kamijou looked up at the building and muttered.

The building could only have been described as strange. The building itself was rectangular and rather standard. However, there were four 12-story buildings on each corner of the junction, forming a “ta” (). Additionally, the linked pathways were overhead, as if forming a suspended bridge above the road as they linked the buildings.

A building like that violates the Land Area Planning Adjustment Project, right? Kamijou looked up at the suspended corridors. Simply put, the jurisdiction of the sky was under the lands' owners. In other words, the space above the roads should have been public areas.

"Never mind. It's not important." Kamijou muttered and again stared at the Misawa Cram's Academy City branch.

Examining the building, it was implausible for people to associate it with the term "religious science" that was outside of normal understanding. It truly seemed like an ordinary cram school: there were students walking in and out on occasion. It was nothing abnormal.

"Anyways, our initial target is the 5th level of the South Building beside the restaurant. Apparently there's a secret room there." Stiyl said conversationally. The diagram was incinerated after Kamijou read it which possibly meant that Stiyl had memorized the entire map.

"A secret room?"

"Yeah. It should be some trick illusion or distortion that makes people ignorant of its existence. The building's interior is like a kid's toy block, there are many crevices." Stiyl stared at the building. "…I found 17 secret rooms just looking at the diagram. And the closest one is the one beside the restaurant on the South Building's 5th floor."

"…Ohh. But, it doesn't look like those booby-trapped ninja houses." Kamijou muttered.

"…Yeah, sure doesn't look like it." Stiyl responded viciously.

"Eh?"

Kamijou turned his head and found Stiyl staring at the building that seemed to penetrate the sky and earth. After a time, he shook his head and sighed. "Nothing. In fact, as an expert, I can't find any abnormalities… Nothing at all even analyzing as an expert."

Though Stiyl said it, he seemed stressed. The expression on his face was like that

of a doctor who found something wrong on an X-ray but still could not identify the source of the illness.

"..."

It was suspicious, much too suspicious. Though he knew not what was going on, it was much too suspicious.

Stiyl had only said that he could not find anything. He had never said that the building was safe. Inside the building, there could have been numerous mines that they simply did not know about and perhaps there was truly nothing. They could confirm nothing and in essence were entering blind.

Rhetorically speaking, was it safe to enter a building that a magical expert could not vouch for?

“Of course we shouldn’t.” Stiyl answered concisely. “But entering is the only option, right? Our aim is to save people, not kill them. I’d be really grateful if I could just burn this building to the ground from out here.” His words had to have been more than half serious.

“Hold on… What do you mean we can only go in? Are we going to go in through the front door? No tactics? Like no way to avoid being detected or beating the enemy safely?”

“What. Don’t tell me you have some ideas?”

“…ACK! Are you kidding me!? Are you really going to charge like that? How is that any different from charging into a building occupied by terrorists?! Even if it’s just a dumb trick, can’t you just throw in bait!?”

“…Hm. Using a knife to carve the rune ‘AnsuzGebo’ can hide a person’s presence.”

“THEN DO IT! HURRY UP AND DO IT!”

“Listen to me!” He answered with an irritated tone. “Even if we get rid of our presence or become invisible, I’ll leave a mana signal saying ‘Stiyl Magnus just used magic.’”

“...What?”

“You have no concept of how mana works at all. Seems like I’ll have to explain it to you.” Stiyl sighed. “For example, what if there’s a map that only has red colors on it?”

"…Psychologically, I think it's a bad omen."

“Shut up and don’t butt in. The red color indicates Aureolus’ magic in the entire building. What if I colored this map blue?”

“…I don’t really understand but you’ll basically be a walking transmitter, right?”

“That’s kind of right, but it’s more than that.” Stiyl continued as Kamijou was about to ask why. “Your Imagine Breaker is like an eraser than removes the red color. If one’s painting is being eating up, anyone would realize that something’s wrong. I wouldn’t be detected as long as I didn’t use magic but your ability is always active.”

“…Alright. So that means we’re walking transmitters so there’s no point in tactics and might as well enter a building filled with terrorists. Should we ring the doorbell first?”

“And that’s why we need your power. If you don’t want to be full of holes like a beehive, use your right hand and be a shield.”

“ARE YOU KIDDING ME?! WHY DO YOU ACT LIKE IT’S GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH YOU!? IT’S BECAUSE YOU’RE USELESS THAT I HAVE TO DO THIS!”

“Ahahah. No need to be so nervous. It’s just an alchemist’s magic. Your right hand managed to block the Saint George’s Dragon Breath. It should be able to handle it. And, it’s useless to rely on me. I sent Innocentius to protect that child and right now I can only use a flame sword.”

“WAAAAAAAHH!! YOU REALLY DON’T THINK THINGS THROUGH!!”

Kamijou watched the exit; the automatic doors were not abnormal.

Incidentally, Kamijou did not want to enter. It was to be expected. What person

would want to invade a booby-trapped battlefield housing an expectant enemy? What was more, it was the central stronghold for a fanatical religion that none knew the truth about.

However, because of these things, they had to enter. If men trembled before the sight of such a place, how could they allow a girl to remain inside simply because she was called “Deep Blood”?

“Let’s go.” The magician Stiyl Magnus said. Without another word, Kamijou approached the automatic doors.

Upon entering through the class doors, they found the scene to be extremely normal. Much of the glass that built the hall brought in extra sunlight. The hall itself was extremely wide and approximately three stories high. Near the elevator, a non-renovated staircase was placed for the sake of emergency exits.

Perhaps as a result of being evening, it was break time for ordinary schools. The length of time should have been as long as an afternoon excursion and there were a modicum of student heading out to purchase dinners.

Kamijou and Stiyl were not attracting any real attention, possibly because the manager had not memorized every student’s appearance. And, even if they were discovered to be outsiders, considering it was an entrance hall, others would have believed they were there to consolidate the administration process.

…Forget about me, does this guy even look like a student?

Kamijou sighed. Though one could call the man a teenager, he was still a priest that reeked of cologne, had hair dyed red, wore earrings and rings and was quite the ridiculous height.

Who he was aside, looking around, they could find nothing amiss. Those around them walked about seemed quite normal.

“Eh?”

Thus, the only abnormality was rather obvious.

Of the four elevators, between the two on the right, there was a human-shaped robot lying—or rather placed—there. Its limbs were severely twisted and it was

like a pile of scrap metal that reminded one of serious traffic accidents.

In terms of type, it was similar to a suit of Western armor. However, the figure was as exceedingly modernistic as a fighter jet with an intrinsic design and a texture that reflected a silver light, dissimilar from ordinary metal plate. An 80 centimeter long bow was dropped nearby, presumably equipment for the machine.

On the object's right wrist was the word "Parsifal" that perhaps represented its name. At first glance, one could tell that the robot could not fulfill its original purpose. The supposed limbs were severely twisted while a slick tar-like black oil oozed from the dysfunctional limbs.

The rusty smell in the air caused Kamijou to frown.

What in the world is that?

First of all, where did this robot come from? The security robots and cleaning robots in Academy City look like large metal cylinders. Kamijou had never heard of such humanoid machines in Academy City that simultaneously lacked mobility.

Second of all, why did this thing break down? Though Kamijou knew not how functional the machine was originally, it was akin to the aftermath of a traffic collision. There would have been no need for such force, correct? What had occurred in that cram school's hall?

And, finally: …*Why hasn't anyone noticed yet?*

The humans there ignored its very existence as if not even worth gossiping over. Rather than a sensation of deliberate ignorance, the machine was like a pebble on the road, unworthy of notice.

It was as if… the damaged robot had snuck into their daily life.

"What? There's nothing here. Anyways, either we find Himegami or crush Izzard. Hurry up." Stiyl said with ease.

"Ah… oh." Kamijou at last managed to tear his gaze from the machine because none beside him paid it any notice, giving him the impression he witnessed a

phantom.

But… it was not a phantom. It truly existed before Kamijou's gaze.

"What? Are you interested by that thing? Oh well, that's true, it might be something rare for you." Stiyl had seemed to finally notice Kamijou's interest in the machine.

"We-Well yeah… eh. Hold on. Robots are something from the science side, right?" As Kamijou spoke, Stiyl proceeded to frown. "What are you talking about? That's just a corpse."

It was an indisputably shocking reply.

"What…?" Kamijou could not comprehend.

"A caster's incantations and a Heavenly Bow duplicate. This here should be one of the 13 Knights of the Roman Catholic Church. They're probably here to execute the heretic but it looks like they were crushed. Really. Knights were an English specialty and these guys that just love to copy ended up like this." Stiyl shook the cigarette in his mouth. "…Tch. Speaking of which, that man in formalin is too sneaky. There was already another church helping out and he still made us enter separately. Was he deliberately trying to make us fail…? It's true that the ones here to settle this mess are elites of the church and it'd be good if he could get even one of them killed…"

Stiyl continued to mutter angrily. Kamijou, however, unaware of the circumstances, ignored it.

Kamijou chose to clearly stare at the something lying on the floor. The limbs were twisted, it was a pile of scrap metal like the wreckage of a collision, the silvery metal body was crushed and reddish-black oil oozed out. The remains of a machine.

No.

What if it were not reddish-black oil but something less black and more red?

No.

What if they were not machinery but a human clad in armor?

“Why are you so surprised?” Stiyl said, as if it were a pedestrian sight. “This is a battlefield. What’s so strange about seeing a corpse or two on the way?”

“…” Kamijou was speechless. He already knew. He should have known. It was a field of combat where humans killed humans. The enemy had already prepared traps for intruders like Kamijou and simply waited for them to enter. Even then, Kamijou and Stiyl had no intentions of negotiation with the vicious enemy.

Yes, they should have known. Even so, Kamijou could not overlook it.

“Damn it!”

Kamijou dashed toward the corpse. He did not know what he could have done, possibly bandage a few places, the amateur Kamijou knew not even the correct emergency procedurals. Not only was the armor severely damaged to the point of questionable life signs, Kamijou could not think of a way to extricate a person out of the twisted armor. Even so, without clear proof, the human being inside the metal may have been alive. If that were the case, it was possible to save the person if he acted quickly.

Kamijou spent a mere ten seconds to run from one end of the hall to the other. Because the fatality’s face was completely encased by the helmet, Kamijou could not see the expression. He could only hear slight air flow through the gap in the block of metal that was a helmet.

He’s still breathing!

As Kamijou felt relieved, he realized that he could not move the body carelessly and considered calling for an ambulance until he heard the sound of metal doors sliding apart.

A number of like-aged teenagers exited the elevator and failed to notice the flayed body. It was as if they saw a normal scene, just continuing to walk as they discussed trivialities like “the food in that restaurant is so expensive and so bad I got sick of it, how about we get something to eat from a convenience store.”

“You guys—!” *They should be saving the injured.* Kamijou understood this fact and was unable to maintain his silence. He inadvertently attempted to grab the

shoulder of a nearby student. “—WHAT ARE YOU DOING? HURRY UP AND CALL AN AMBUL—”

However, Kamijou stopped.

Kamijou’s hand was forcefully dragged forward.

No.

Dragged was inadequate. The force he felt was like attempting to grab the driver’s side door of a moving truck. The magnitude of the propulsion was completely different.

“WHA—!”

His arm was nearly dislocated. The true shock was that the student had not acted at all. Kamijou’s hand on that shoulder felt like a balloon tied to a car. What was more, the person seemed completely ignorant Kamijou’s roar let alone his hand.

Before them, Kamijou was like the twisted suit of armor.

“…What’s going on?” Kamijou recalled the sensation his hand experienced. While he expected the texture of soft fabric clothing, his hand felt like it passed through extremely hard glue. Forget the student’s shoulder, Kamijou could not reach the clothing.

“It’s a boundary like the two sides of a coin. The students are on the ‘front of the coin’ and can’t detect those of us on the ‘back of the coin.’ We, the intruders on the back, can’t interfere with the people on the ‘front’ who are ignorant. Look.” Stiyl spoke like he was chanting and raised a finger to point at a girl walking out of the elevator.

Kamijou’s eyes followed the girl’s back. She stepped into the blood but her shoes were not stained and left no bloody footprints. The pool of blood acted like one large sheet of hardened plastic.

“Hm.” Stiyl carelessly pinched the chewed cigarette in his mouth and pressed the burning red tip to the plastic elevator button. Despite his action, the plastic button was not burnt, let alone melted. “I see. So, the entire building is a part of the ‘front’? I guess that’s right since this is suitable as a fortress against magic.

Kamijou Touma, it would seem that with our power alone we may be unable to open a single door, even automatic ones. We're stuck."

"..." A boundary. If it were a supernatural power, even if a term alien to Kamijou, a resident of the science side, was this not an opportunity for Kamijou Touma to rise?

Kamijou clenched his fists tightly. Imagine Breaker. If a supernatural power came in contact with that right hand, it would have been negated, even a miracle of God. It was a unique power among unique powers.

Kamijou clenched his fist and raised it high into the air. He then proceeded to slam his fist forcefully against the floor, wanting to smash the boundary into pieces. Yes, he hammered it down but there was only a dull noise.

"WOAH! AHHHHHHHHH!!!!"

"What are you doing?" Seeing Kamijou roll about on the floor, Stiyl, overwhelmed, sighed. "This's probably like my Innocentius. If we don't destroy the core of the magic, we can't break this boundary. And, most likely… the core is placed outside the boundary or the people inside would be locked in. Hmm. We've got some trouble now."

Kamijou seemed truly unaware of what to do. "…Damn it. So, what should we do? We've got an injured person here and we can't call a doctor or take him outside…"

"We don't have to do anything. He's dead."

"WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? CHECK HIS BREATHING! HE'S STILL ALIVE!"

"Yeah. He's definitely alive if we go by heartbeat. But, his fractured ribs punctured his lungs, his liver's crushed, his pulse is faint… he can't be saved in this situation. His name might as well be 'corpse.'" It was unknown whether Stiyl determined the facts through rune magic, but his words were as cold-hearted as a doctor declaring that a patient acquired a terminal illness.

"…!!!"

“What’s with the expression? You knew from the start, right? Even if he’s breathing, he can’t be saved.”

Suddenly, Kamijou lifted Stiyl up at his chest with both of his hands. He could not comprehend. Kamijou could not comprehend. How could the person before him remain so calm? How could he say such words in front of a dying person?

“MOVE ASIDE! THIS PERSON DOESN'T HAVE MUCH—!!”

Stiyl calmly pushed Kamijou aside. “We don’t have much time. I’ll let you cast, what you think is pity, on the dead. It’s a priest’s job to send the dead to heaven. You, amateur, step aside.”

Kamijou, releasing his hands, finally noticed. Stiyl, whose back then faced Kamijou, stared at the knight who was borderline from death. Stiyl was…

He’s… angry…?

It was difficult to imagine, given his typical mockery, but Kamijou was not mistaken. At that moment, Stiyl Magnus was not a magician while his back seemed to emanate static electricity, seemingly deflecting everything that came in contact. Yes. This was the back of Stiyl Magnus, the priest.

Stiyl did not enact some obscure, special ritual.

“…” He spoke unintelligible, at least to Kamijou, foreign words. The words came from the priest, not the magician. Kamijou did not know the significance of the action but the formerly immobile knight trembled and raised his right hand, stretching it out at Stiyl as if to catch something in the air.

“… …” The Knight spoke as well.

Stiyl nodded his head, Kamijou was as unknowing as always, and the knight’s body seemed to relax, losing tension. It was like he had handed over what he had wanted to… with no worries left, he relaxed with relief.

The knight’s hand dropped.

The metallic right hand landed on the floor, resounding like a knell.

“…” Still in his priestly persona, Stiyl Magnus drew the cross before his chest. At the point of death, there was no difference between an Anglican and a Roman Catholic. The last rites were still the last rights.

It was then that Kamijou finally realized.

It was a true battlefield.

“Let’s go!”

He spoke once more as a magician rather than a priest. “It would seem we have one more reason to fight.”

Part 4

He was feeling terrible.

Their initial goal was to seek the gaps in the building, the secret rooms. The nearest secret room was on the fifth floor of the South Block building so they began to climb stairs.

Why do I feel like shit? Kamijou wondered as he climbed the narrow emergency staircase. Initially, he believed it was because of the knight and then because the staircase was narrow and dark.

However, there was a physical reason additional to the psychological.

“My legs…” Kamijou looked down at his legs that were showing unnatural fatigue.

The “front” and “back” of the coin meant that magicians who knew of the “back” could not interfere with the citizens of the “front”. These were the rules of the game that Stiyl had outlined.

But, the entire building was a part of the “front”. The result of this part of the game meant that stepping on the floor would recoil against the foot. To analogize, it was the difference between punching flesh and punching concrete. As they walked on a “ridiculously hard floor”, the fatigue accumulated 2-3 times faster.

“We… can only… pray… that the… enemy is in… the same situation…” Stiyl seemed irate that they were fatigued so quickly. Though his build was rather large, it seemed that he had not done much physical training and was unaccustomed to strenuous physical activity.

“Che… if I had known, we should have taken the elevator.”

“We’re on the ‘back of the coin’, how can we press a button on the ‘front of the coin?’ If you can do it, teach me.”

"..."

“Even if we did enter the lift, if students on the front used it, we’d be crushed if a lot of them walked in.”

The individuals on the “back” could not interfere with those on the “front”.

For example, if a car from the “back” collided into a person from the “front”, the car would have been wrecked while the human would escape unscathed.

If the elevator were crammed with people, they would be like raw eggs in a fully occupied train: crushed. …*Ugh, this is just getting more and more depressing.*

Kamijou lowered his head dejectedly. He was already tired and with the dark and murky thoughts swimming in his mind, he began to want to give up.

Think happy thoughts. Hurry up and think of something happy… Kamijou’s heart was in urgent need of rest.

“Oh yeah, where’re phones?”

“What?”

“You discussed the ‘fronts’ and ‘backs’ of the coin right? Will phones work?” Kamijou asked as he took out his phone. He said the words himself and realized they were excuses. Because too many abnormal things occurred around him, he had to do something “normal” or he felt he may have gone crazy.

As for whom to call, Kamijou needed not a moment to consider: his room. Meaning, he would call the girl who was waiting in his room. As he was about to call, he considered something. “…Wait. Wouldn’t the enemy detect the signal and attack us?”

“Who knows? But, our existence might already be discovered. We did enter from the front door.”

“Then why weren’t we attacked?”

“God knows. Maybe it’s because they’re so overconfident or maybe because they intend to destroy us in one go. That alchemist is that kind of person. Right now, he’s probably preparing all sorts of ways to counterattack.”

“…” *Really? Why in the world does your God exist?* However, since their whereabouts were likely exposed, there was no need to dilly dally. Kamijou decided to brazenly make the call.

Three rings.

So it won’t work…?

Six rings.

…Looks like I’ll have to give up.

Nine rings.

HURRY UP AND PICK UP! Despite his impatience, Kamijou did not want to hang up. During his wait, he had another thought. *What if this doesn’t have to do with the coin stuff? What if Index doesn’t want to pick up? Or… what if it isn’t that she won’t but she can’t?*

Don’t tell me… Something happened to Index?

Ind—!?

As a mysterious chill rose up in Kamijou’s stomach, he was met with a voice, Index’s extremely nervous voice to be exact. “Erm. Hello! This is Index Libror —excuse me, I’m sorry. This is Kamijou speaking. Hello? Hello?”

“Oi. Tell me…” Kamijou lethargically asked as if he had just trialed the wrong method of dieting. “…is this is first time you’ve answered a phone call?”

“Uweeh!? Th-This voice is Touma’s. Eh? Do all voices sound the same in phones?”

He then heard the sound of knocking. It was likely a puzzled Index with a tilted

head, knocking the receiver against the floor.

“INDEX! STOP HITTING THE MACHINE WHEN YOU THINK IT’S BROKEN! THAT’S WHAT A GRANNY WOULD DO TO FIX SOMETHING!”

“…That’s weird. The only person who’d say such stupid things is Touma.”

OI!!! Kamijou retorted silently.

It was expected considering it was her first time responding to a phone call (though it seemed she had seen others answer before, judging from her initial “hello”). Apparently she paced frantically in front of the phone but as it continued to ring she was forced to answer.

The “magic” expert who commanded the knowledge of 103,000 grimoires apparently understood nothing of science, a fact that amused Kamijou. However, Kamijou remembered something from his knowledge base that said that Index lacked most of her memories save but a year’s worth.

Considering that such a comical deficiency was caused by memory loss was actually quite heartbreaking.

“Niyai? Touma? Why did you deliberately use such a troublesome, exaggerated, excessive and unfriendly thing like a phone? Did something serious happen?”

“Ah… nothing…”

It seemed to Index telephones were an abnormal existence. “Ah. Is it because one of the two lasagnas in the refrigerator was for Touma!?”

“You ate it? …Oh well—”

“Ah!” Before Kamijou could continued, Index exclaimed. “Ah! There was pudding in the refrigerator…!”

“YOU ATE IT!?! THAT WAS MY PUDDING!!!”

“But there was only one!”

“CAN’T YOU THINK ABOUT THE MASTER OF THE HOUSEHOLD!? IT WAS BLACK HONEY PUDDING! ONE OF THEM COSTS 700 YEN!!!” Kamijou grieved. “…Ugh… O-Oh well. Never mind. I went off on a tangent. Since the call connected, never mind.”

“…? Touma were you looking for me or something?”

“Argh. I’m just testing if I can reach you. I’m hanging up.”

“??”

Right about now, Index is probably tilting her head in confusion, right? Kamijou thought and continued. “Ah. Oh yeah. Did you know, Index? For every minute you use a phone, your lifespan is shorted by a day?”

WAAHHH! The phone line cut off. It seemed the receiver was dropped onto the floor.

“…Such a simple-minded person.” He spoke to himself, having taken his pudding-induced revenge, and hung up the phone.

“…” However, it seemed the magician wished to say something.

“Wh-What?”

“Nothing.” Stiyl sighed. “It’s just that I think you’re too relaxed. This’s a battlefield and yet you’re nonchalantly chatting away with a girl. I don’t really care if you die because of carelessness. In fact, I’d be dancing in joy, but, please don’t drag me down.”

“Are you jealous?”

“Ku… Ugh…” Stiyl silently seemed like he would burst 60% of his blood vessels. Kamijou began to understand how to handle the person before him.

“…Yeah, that’s right.” Stiyl’s words induced surprising shock for Kamijou, though he knew not why he was so affected. “…Don’t be mistaken. I’m not considering that child a target of romance.”

Without looking at Kamijou’s face, Stiyl continued. “You should know that up

until now, the child had her memories erased in one year intervals or die. Then, you can understand how many people were once in your position."

"…"

"Many have wanted to be her father, some, her older brother, others her good friend, and some even her teacher." Stiyl elaborated. "It's like that, just that simple. I failed in the past and you succeeded. This's the only difference between you and me."

Stiyl stared at Kamijou's face and looked like he was facing an impossible future. "However, I'd be lying if I said that I didn't care." He said with a sigh. "Besides, she didn't really abandon me, just forgot. If she recovered her memories, she'd coming running at me to hug me."

Kamijou had no response. *If there was a person, a really important person, that lost her memory… and unknowingly, someone just stepped in and accompanied her, how would I feel? Could I remain calm?* Kamijou mused to himself. *No, this isn't just a problem of someone else being beside her.*

Would he not have felt betrayed by this important girl? However, the man before him still believed in himself, still following through with his belief.

So strong.

Kamijou looked back at his phone and considered the meaningless five minute conversation. A person had actually given up everything he had in order to protect the person important to him, knowing there was no going back.

Such were people's hearts. These hearts were crushed under the current Kamijou's feet. What right did he of the moment have to keep the girl for himself?

…I don't know.

If it were her only wish to maintain the status quo, Kamijou would have protected it until the end. However, Index had "merely forgotten." How could a girl who was unaware of the other possibilities be expected to make a decision?

I don't know. But, if Kamijou Touma really saved Index…

Yes, if it were the case, he had to take up the burden of protecting her. It was like enthusiastically giving a cat food but not taking it home, despite knowing it would die of hunger. Instead of giving the cat the hope that “this person might keep me,” it would have been better to give it despair from the beginning.

However…

The one who saved her wasn’t the current “me”.

His thoughts came full circle.

Who Index needs is the Kamijou Touma of before.

Part 5

After climbing to the fifth floor, Kamijou and Stiyl arrived at a corridor.

Stiyl had completely memorized the diagram of Misawa Cram School, which was why they had gone to that floor. Using the parameters of the diagram and actual measurements taken through infrared and ultrasonic means, he had derived error spaces.

Halfway through the middle of the straight corridor, Stiyl lightly knocked on a normal-looking wall.

“…Even if we’re right here, if we can’t open it, we have to give up, right?”

“Yeah.”

Even if it were a normal room rather than “secret”, for Kamijou and Stiyl, as residents as the back, could not open the door. If they wanted to enter, they could slip in once a student of the front opened the door. However, if a secret room, students may not go in and out.

“But it’s best to check out the situation. No matter how strong the boundary is, the caster is Aureolus. We can just force him to remove the boundary by

threatening—or killing—him."

"…" Kamijou inadvertently stared at the other. It was a "battlefield," and Aureolus was the "enemy" to defeat. Kamijou understood this. Considering the imprisoned Himegami Aisa and the knight killed by Aureolus, one could imagine the precariousness of the situation.

However, even so, Kamijou could not say something like kill Aureolus because his actions taken on the knight was also self defense.

He had said "kill him" instead of "beat" or "stop", there was no ambiguity.

They headed down the wall nearest to the secret room and they arrived at the student cafeteria. It seemed they were mixing the people into the wide room to dilute the secret room's existence. It applied an allusion and there were no doors for secret room visible from the cafeteria entrance.

To prevent themselves from being caught in the crowded entrance, Kamijou and Stiyl entered the cafeteria.

The individuals on the back could not interfere with the people on the front. Boys fought for the few available seats and the girls carried trays of food and chatted away as they walked. People rushed about like bulls. Unlike a corridor, the movements in the wide cafeteria were unpredictable. Kamijou and Stiyl were carefully avoiding the crowd.

Since it was evening, many students were in the cafeteria. It was actually quite the refreshing experience for Kamijou to have others ignore his presence, a feeling unknown when moving in traffic jams. Those experienced in such matters would realize that surrounding people consciously avoid one another to prevent collision.

The secret room contained a counter and behind it a small kitchen. The large freezer and utensils made the kitchen feel even more cramped, causing others to be ignorant of the space's actual size.

"…Hm. It's my first time actually seeing a science religion but it doesn't look like much. It thought they'd at least put up the picture of some bishop."

"…It's true it doesn't look that dangerous." Kamijou looked around.

In the realm of science, there were indicators of a religion's fanaticism. For example, there include the level of acquiring funds from believers, the expansion level of indoctrinating new believers, the absolutism level where believers accept all orders even at risk of self-destruction, the dangerous item level where poisonous gases or explosives are produced, and so on. Religions that scored higher were deemed as decidedly more dangerous.

From a scientific viewpoint, Misawa Cram was unlike truly dangerous religions. As members were students, acquiring significant funds was unlikely and as a cram school, creating chemical weapons was not a feasible idea.

"…No. This really is a dangerous science cult." Kamijou said disdainfully.

Though the students were gathered in a cafeteria, the atmosphere was as heavy as an elevator.

It's to be expected, Kamijou thought. *Everyone here might be talking happily but the conversations aren't.* They had little else to discuss aside from things that belittled others like "how many I beat the last practice exam," "how many points my score went up," or "I don't understand how there're trash who won't study" for the sake of self-gratification.

Kamijou examined an extremely ordinary cram school poster on the cafeteria wall. On it were two extreme sentences, "If you study hard now, you'll get into a great school and assure yourself a great future." and "If you don't study now, you'll end up at the bottom and meet misfortune."

This is just like chain mail. He thought. Chain mails were prank mails that promised good fortune or unhappiness with things like "If you send this mail to 7 persons within 7 days you'll be happy forever. If you don't you'll be unlucky." Such threatening intents were no different from radical religions.

"Hmph. This school's motto is something like 'extremely smart shall be those that study here,' right? Well. These teachers must be brainwashing the kids with things like 'this is something that'll definitely be tested. I'm telling you, those that didn't study here over the summer are inferior', huh?"

"How infuriating." Kamijou muttered with true disgust. He was unhappy that he could actually somewhat empathize for them. *Exams tend to be involved in superstitions.* Regardless of their sedulousness, students tended to attempt

unscientific foods that increased concentration or would even bring to the exam hall talismans for becoming the top scorer.

It was a deficiency called insecurity. The religion of Misawa Cram exploited this gap and stabbed into it with a knife.

“Hm. Seems like you’ve been interested by the fanatical gas, eh? But, don’t forget our aim. We need to find the secret entrance.”

“Oh. Okay, okay! I got it!” Kamijou took a deep, calming breath and turned to examine the entire cafeteria.

Immediately, approximately 80 students turned to stare at him. Initially, Kamijou was under the impression that his loudly speaking resulted in attracting their attention.

“Well. This doesn’t look good… Is this the first safety?”

Despite Stiyl’s voiced seriousness, Kamijou could not react. “Ah? Eh?”

“Don’t you understand the situation? The people on the front shouldn’t be able to see those on the back. I see… so there’s an alarm like this around the secret room?”

“…” Kamijou peered around.

Close to 80 students were without question staring at them. Their individual humanness had disappeared and was replaced with a blank, glass-like stare.

“Do-Don’t tell me—“ It was true. The students were residents of the back of the coin. “—a magician!”

As Kamijou shouted out without meaning, Stiyl had abandoned Kamijou and back away.

“The wings of the seraph shines brightly and the bright light is a pure white color that reveals all sins…” One of the students near the front began to mutter ambiguities.

“The pure white color is proof of purity, the mark is the result of one’s

actions…” An additional voice overlapped with the first.

“The result is the future, the future is time is uniform…” A second, third, fourth, fifth sixth seventh eighth ninth tenth eleventh twelfth thirteen fourteen fifteen sixteen seventeen eighteen nineteen…

“Uniformity is all, all is created by the past, the past is the cause, cause is one. One is sin, sin are humans. Humans fear, fear is guilt. Guilt resides within oneself. **If in oneself there is something one despises, the wings of the seraph shall reveal your sins and purge it from within!**”

An 80-person chorus, or perhaps a pugilistic verbal maelstrom created by the thousands within the building, echoed unceasingly.

Hovering in front of each student’s forehead was a ping-pong ball sized blue-white glow. Perhaps the orbs were beginning to gather as they floated and even stuck to the floor below Kamijou, coming from the lower floor.

And then, like explosives or the sizzling of a strong acid, the orbs emitted smoke. Touching even one would have caused burns.

“Oi! Strongest shield Imagine Breaker! It’s time for you to step up!”

“What? Oi!” Peering back, the uncountable orbs were closing in, blocking Kamijou’s line of vision. “Uwah! With so many… HOW AM I SUPPOSED TO BLOCK THEM ALL?!”

With a mad dash to the exit, Kamijou chased Stiyl’s back and overtook him. Stiyl, who had thought Kamijou would act as a shield, felt some panic and escaped behind Kamijou out of the cafeteria.

“Wh-Why are you running away?! You’re the shield! Your right hand blocked Dragon Breath! Instead of using your right hand you’re running away with your back exposed!? Are you crazy!?”

“WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT!? I DON’T WANT TO HEAR THAT FROM SOMEONE USING ME AS A SHIELD! THIS IS A CASE QUANTITY NOT QUALITY! HOW CAN I NEGATE ALL OF THAT WITH ONE RIGHT HAND!!”

To analogize, it was like fighting something with four limbs. Even if one flawlessly guarded against two limbs, the other two could still strike. An individual's power was unlikely to make that of a group's.

With a boom, a large number of the orbs filed out of the entrance and flooded out the floodgates that were the cafeteria entrance. Kamijou and Stiyl could only run down the corridor.

"Tch. Speaking of which… this might be a replica, but to be able to replicate the Gregorian Chant means I underestimated Aureolus Izzard."

"What's this Grego whatever?"

"Once, it was the ultimate weapon… A grand spell that required 3,333 praying monks gathered in a cathedral. It was like running sunlight through a magnifying glass to increase output." Stiyl gritted his teeth. "Though this's a replica with only 2,000 students, as the saying goes in this country, 'pile up sand and you can build a tower.' Its power can't be underestimated."

Kamijou was stunned. Though his understanding was limited, did it not mean they were not facing 2,000 opponents? It was a battlefield and he was in the midst of an enemy camp, this much he could understand, but the concept of fighting 2,000 individuals was despairing.

"Then there's no way we can beat this head on! Even if this place is huge, we'll still get caught playing hide-and-seek with 2,000 people!"

"Not quite," Stiyl said, still facing forward. "The emphasis is in the core. The Gregorian Chant requires the simultaneous controlling of 2,000 people or it fails. If we can find the core of the 2,000 people and destroy it, we'll end the Gregorian Chant."

The two of them ran down the long corridor and finally arrived near the staircase. At the same moment, they noticed a large number of blue-white orbs deluging in. They were pincered.

"The stairs! Move it!" Kamijou and Stiyl frantically ducked under the stairs beside them. Kamijou intended to inquire whether they should go up and down the stairs, but he realized something was amiss.

“You… You’ve been looking so calm for a while. Do you have some secret plan?” It was true. For someone who had barely escaped the jaws of death, Stiyl seemed much too calm.

“Hm. I do have a plan. I’ve just been wondering whether I should use it.”

“ARE YOU KIDDING ME!? IF YOU HAVE ONE, HURRY UP AND USE IT!”

With an “oh”, Stiyl happily looked at Kamijou’s face. In face of the abnormal smile, Kamijou inadvertently held his breath and became more alert.

Don. Stiyl pushed Kamijou down the stairs.

“What…” Before he could even react, he had lost his balance and had tumbled down the stairs. The numerous stabs of pain surrounded him and it was impossible to even cry out, for if he did, he would have likely bit his tongue.

“Bad luck, scarecrow.” Stiyl’s joyful voice was audible from above. Dazed, Kamijou could see him running away in the opposite direction, upstairs. Then, the flood approached and split both ways, and rushed at Kamijou like flowing water.

“That bastard!”

Kamijou dragged his pained body and ran downwards. Stiyl’s words passed through his thoughts. They were in Aureolus’ stronghold, a place filled with mana. Like an entirely red picture, if any blue (in this case Stiyl’s) paint was added, the enemy would soon realize something was amiss. On the other hand, if Stiyl avoided using magic, he would go unnoticed.

However, it was different for Kamijou. His Imagine Breaker endlessly erased the red color. Stiyl had the option to use or not to use, but Kamijou was like a perpetual transmitter.

All in all, Kamijou was brought there to be a convenient decoy to abandon. He had thought Stiyl’s lack of planning was irrational but in truth this reasoning lied at the heart.

…*Damn it! Eh. Hold on, something’s not right.* Kamijou’s heart rang an alarm

but he knew not why. As the current Kamijou could think of no reason, it must have been the pre-amnesia Kamijou warning him.

As his thoughts raced, a fresh set of footsteps interrupted him, coming from below… and blocking his escape route.

"…!"

The deluging orbs continued to converge onto Kamijou, but he could not possibly stop. So, instead he dashed and peered downstairs. There was a girl, one whom he had never met and whose uniform was unfamiliar, awaiting Kamijou. She was perhaps a candidate, one or two years older than Kamijou, with black braids and rounded spectacles. In all honestly it did not seem that she could fight, let alone use magic.

"The flames punish sin; purgatory governs the flames. Purgatory was created to burn sinners, the only violence God recognizes."

What came out of her cute lips caused Kamijou unhappiness. Each time she spoke, the blue-white orb in front of her grew in size. It seemed the front and back of the coin had flipped. The girl should have been a student on the front but became a magician on the back. This was perhaps true for every Misawa Cram student. Though in truth, Kamijou could have easily knocked the girl down.

I can win this…!

Kamijou clenched his right fist, and, though he could not definitively defeat 2,000 individuals, one or two of the orbs were no threat. Kamijou clenched his fist tighter as if to confirm the existence of Imagine Breaker.

Then, with a "crack!" the girl's face exploded as if fire crackers were planted beneath her skin.

"What…?"

Simultaneous to Kamijou's shock, the girl's fingers, nose, under the cloths… released miniature explosions, one after the other. The explosions were small enough that they only burned holes a few centimeters wide on her skin.

"Violence… is the affirmation of death. Affirmation is… recognition. Re…

cog… ni…” Each time the girl spoke a single word, her body cracked further. Her lips eventually began to crack as well and blood flowed out of her mouth, showing her innards were severely damaged. Despite the damage, she continued to speak. In reality, it was more like she could not talk. She seemed like a frog being controlled by a machine, her leg muscles twitched against her will from the continuous electrocution.

Don’t tell me…

Anxiety rose up in Kamijou’s stomach and his knowledge was informing him, though he knew not where the ridiculous information came from.

Espers couldn't use magic. Though espers and magicians were similar in their abilities to utilize supernatural powers, the applications were different. The “circuits” in espers were different from those of ordinary humans; even if they attempted to imitate a magician, they would be unsuccessful.

That in mind, they were in Academy City. All students there had undertaken some esper development curriculum. With this assumption, what would have happened if espers unable to use magic… did?

“Stop… it…” Kamijou muttered, forgetting his personal situation.

The circuitry was incompatible, his brain told him this. Though Kamijou himself knew little magic basis, the feeling may have been like a generator meant to run on batteries being run through an alternating current. Though the current might flow and the circuit might work, such an unreasonable method would burn out the circuit.

“STOP IT! YOU CAN TELL YOUR OWN BODY IS IN TROUBLE!!” He had forgotten to even clench his fist. At that moment, though it felt like there was a gun pointed at his head, he dashed down the stairs without a thought.

“…tion. Re… st… with… in. Within… refers… to… the world. Connect your inner… self with the outside… world.” The girl suddenly let out a deep sound and went silent.

The bridge between her eyebrows exploded and the blue-white orb she casted disappeared, leaving behind a fresh red wound. Her last sound seemed to betray the fatality of the wound while the girl swayed about and tumbled forward on the

stairs.

Kamijou's mind was informing him… *A human body is heavy. Even a girl of petite size can be truly heavy if carried around like luggage. If you're burdened with several extra kilograms, evading the flood of orbs will be impossible.*

Kamijou's mind was informing him… *This girl's even an enemy. There will be no merits to saving her, you might even be attacked. If you consider life as the largest priority, leave this enemy behind and escape.*

Kamijou's mind was informing him… *Most importantly, a severely wounded casualty like her can't possibly be saved. Not only are her wounds obviously fatal, she's been poisoned by a religious science.*

"…" Hearing the voices in his mind caused Kamijou to gnash his teeth. "STOP MESSING AROUND!"

Kamijou still decided to rush down the stairs and reached his hand out to save the girl that was ready to collapse. It was true that the girl was heavy and it was also true that it was already difficult for him to make an escape and it was again true that with extra luggage, he could not possibly outrun the tidal wave of orbs. The girl was an enemy, a physically and emotionally wounded one at that, and Kamijou understood it.

Even so, there was no reason to abandon a wounded girl and let her be devoured by the coming deluge of orbs. Even if he searched the entire world, he would never find a reason to justify such an action.

Most likely, the girl had not intended for it to happen. She believed she was just joining an ordinary cram school but upon enrollment was soon manipulated by the science religion. Unknowingly, she became a pawn.

Kamijou remember the knight who had died in front of the elevator. Most people could not have possibly left the injured there alone, even if an enemy.

"Guu… Damn it!"

Don! The girl collapsed onto Kamijou's chest and she seemed even lighter than expected, even if this were only true from the perspective of people. As luggage, she could have been considered extremely heavy and, as this happened halfway

down the stairs, Kamijou almost fell down as he attempted to maintain his balance.

Carrying the bloodied girl, Kamijou intended to continue his run down the stairs and he checked behind himself.

“…”

The flood had already appeared before him.

Kamijou began to frantically swat at orbs with his right hand while he rushed down the final steps with the girl cradled in his left arm. An unconscious person was quite a bit heavier than he had expected, as if he were swimming with a metal ball weighing him down.

He wanted to jump, but his body was grounded by the extra weight. That slight lag allowed the thousands of balls to form a swirling vortex around him.

“…!!”

Kamijou reflexively shut his eyes and began to think. With the girl under his protection in mind, he could block a few orbs with his body, but it was impossible with thousands chasing them. Kamijou’s body would be eaten away by the balls like metal in acid… devoured by uncountable worms…

“…?”

Nothing had happened. For some time, nothing happened. There was a strange sensation of stopped time and Kamijou did not dare open his eyes recklessly. He was in some fantasy world that would have broken if he opened his eyes and time would flow again. Regardless, it was imperative he did open his eyes.

With a fearful sensation, like for someone disarming a bomb, Kamijou carefully opened his eyes.

“…Ah?”

He could see, but he could not understand. It was like time stopped. The phenomenon he was witnessing could only have been explained by time stopping. The vortex of orbs that was about to swallow him had stopped as if it

were a still image.

After a moment, the seemingly impatient orbs began to move. However, instead of swallowing Kamijou whole, they slowly deliberately dropped to the ground like apples from a tree. Upon ground contact, they submerged.

Then, a new set of footsteps was heard. Kamijou did not understand. Even so, he sought the footsteps that he heard coming from below and stared down. The stairs were linked to the entrance of a corridor where the shining sunset gleamed into the dark emergency staircase.

From there, Deep Blood Himegami Aisa observed upward, as if in the bottom of a well.

Part 6

Stiyl watched as an expended flaming sword vanished. Card runes scattered into the air like sakura petals. There was an ordinary corridor a floor above Kamijou's location, where Stiyl knew the core of the Gregorian Chant was.

He was a magician. To him, the detection of mana flow was a specialty and such a feat was simple. Though the energy harnessed by each individual student was miniscule, the power to control 2,000 people from a single point made the core's location obvious.

"…I see. So this is considered hidden, huh?" muttered Stiyl with a cigarette in his mouth.

Hiding oneself on the front of the coin was an absolute defense against those on the back. The individuals on the back could do nothing to the front, even if it were just the removal of a Christmas wrapper. By putting the core inside of an ordinary wall, it was perfectly defended. Even if an enemy magician were to find the location, if it were impenetrable, the core was safe.

"First I have to wrap the core in the wall itself." Stiyl uninterestedly puffed smoke while he created formless flames. If there were slight distortions in walls or windows that created gaps of barely one millimeter, he could force flames in with the intense 3000 Celsius heat.

The knowledge contained on the front was unsuited for the back. If Aureolus desired a perfect defense, his best option was to place the core into a plastic bag and tie it.

At any rate, without seeing the core, Stiyl destroyed it and it seemed he managed to end the Gregorian Chant.

"…Speaking of which…" Stiyl shook his cigarette. "Looking at this bloody trail, it seems like even the alchemist has fallen so far since we met. A real bloody

road should be made with one’s own blood, right?”

An esper and magician’s physical makeup were different. If espers even attempted magic, the unstable mana would rip apart the blood vessels and nerves in the body. In fact, there were numerous collapsed students on the corridor, even the area around his very feet. Some were still trembling while others were immobile. Searching the rooms would likely have resulted in hellish sights ten times worse than what he saw. On top of the sights, an unknown, thick smell of rust floated about.

Even Stiyl was amazed at his own bitterness; perhaps he still harbored some human feelings.

That guy really seems to believe in me. Recalling that esper boy, Stiyl seemed unable to bear it any longer.

Then, he heard the clear sound of footsteps approaching him from another direction. The steps were confident, had an unsuppressed volume, and seemed to fully express their killing intent, prepared to deliver the killing blow.

If an illustration were needed, it was like daring to knock on an enemy’s door while fully intending to attack. Absolute confidence. It was a declaration of war with the firm belief of success, a preemptive declaration of victory.

The owner of the footsteps spoke. “Naturally, by using the pseudo-Gregorian Chant, I knew I could lure you to the core, no matter where you were hiding.” The footsteps prolonging, he continued. “Certainly, there should be two intruders… where’s the other one? Was that familiar of your swallowed by the Gregorian Chant?”

“I’d be really happy if that happened.” Stiyl said. “But, that guy’s life’ll be longer than you’d think. Also, he’s not something cute like a familiar.” Stiyl chucked and turned to face the owner of the footsteps, his eyes no longer smiling by the end of the turn.

The footsteps came from a pair of Italian leather shoes. The long legs and two meter tall build were wrapped in an expensive, white Western suit. His name was Aureolus, and 18 year old male. He had dyed green hair to signify his control of one of the five elements, earth, while the slicked hairstyle made the Caucasian male all the more unique.

If others were dressed so ridiculously, perhaps they would have been ridiculed. But, for the middle-aged-looking man, his cloths were appropriate.

“What now? What do you intend to do by luring me here when you aren’t a fighter? You should know that you alone can’t stop me. Or rather, how many magic tools do you have on you, you antique salesman?”

“...”

The words seemed taboo for Aureolus. For alchemists to step up and fight on the frontlines, it was imperative that they equip themselves with weapons and spiritual items. Aureolus would have had to use tens, even hundreds, of magic tools to simply be on par with Stiyl.

“Idiot. Can’t you tell that I don’t have any on me?”

“I guess so. But, this entire building itself is like a sacred city, one large magic tool. Even if you don’t use any tools to protect yourself, the surrounding environment will automatically help you. Hm… The problem is, why did you come out? If you stayed put, the sacred city would have fought for you. And, even if you’re out here, you’re still just relying on the power of the sacred city. Why are you here? Or rather, what can you do here?”

“You bastard…!”

Like a snake slithering out of its hole, a cold knife shot out of Aureolus’ right sleeve with a swoosh.

A dart…? Stiyl frowned. Though it seemed like a dart, it was the size of a dagger. As Stiyl began to believe it was throwing weapon…

“Transmute!!” Immediately, the huge dart flew out like a bullet at Stiyl’s eye with a golden chain attached at the end. Stiyl bent his body downwards and the snake-like golden dart flew overhead. A second golden chain flew out of Aureolus’ sleeve, ripped through the air and grazed Stiyl’s face.

“Tch.”

With the sound of a fruit being sliced open, the tip of the dart stabbed into the back of a fallen student.

“…” Stiyl wondered what to say. “…?”

BAM! As if piercing a balloon, the student’s body burst into bits and fluids. It was as if someone had used a powerful acid to dissolve the body but… something was strange. It was not an ordinary liquid but a shiny gold… It was pure gold that melted from the intense heat. With a swish, the chain curled and the dart was back into Aureolus’ sleeve.

“Why are you so shocked?” Aureolus again raised his right hand. “I’m an alchemist and, I suppose, you know how I got this name.”

Stiyl was speechless. The representative magic called alchemy, which was theorized to be able to convert lead into pure gold, truly existed. However, if such a project were to be carried out using modern materials, it would have taken seven trillion yen and a total of three years, a spell with quite the hefty price.

However, Aureolus had actually managed to achieve the magic in less than a second. It was impossibly fast, an unsurpassable record.

“Anyone who’s touched by my Instant Alchemy Limen Magna, will be forcefully transmuted into pure gold. It can’t be defended from nor avoided. Now, show me your ace, your Innocentius. I’m truly interested to see whether the shapeless flames can turn into gold.” The golden dagger lunged out of his sleeve like a snake.

“…” But, Stiyl did not speak. He seemed incredulous of the situation and completely rooted to his location.

“Hm. Inevitable. It’s to be expected you would be shocked after seeing my Limen Magna. But, don’t get killed too easily, I’m not satisfied yet. That attitude of your from five seconds ago can’t be compensated even if you died 10,000 times.”

“So, why must you do something so meaningless?” With surprise, Stiyl Magnus muttered like a child who saw a ghost.

“What…?” The alchemist was shocked.

“What’s so surprising about what I’m saying? The point of magic is to

experiment, not get results, right? Even if an expert can make a magic drug in five seconds, what's the difference if the drug's effects are the same?"

Acting like he had seen something truly idiotic, Stiyl sighed. "It's the same with what you did. Limen Magna? How stupid. How is this any different from dumping acid on someone?"

"…Just…"

"I know you're trying really hard, but it's too much of an overkill to use Innocentius for this. Besides, he's watching a house and I have no need for him here."

"…JUST SHUT UP!!!"

In an attempt to block out the mockery, Aureolus released another Limen Magna from his right sleeve. The dart flew out with the alchemist's rage and, as the strike was much too quick, formed afterimages of several golden lasers. A barrage of ten in one second, the flesh and blood body of the magician Stiyl could not match the velocities. In the end, six of the ten stabbed through the head and abdomen like a sewing machine.

"And, what's with this? Haven't you realized you're just a magic tool?" The runic cards owned by Stiyl danced about in the air. His upper body was pierced into the shape of a honeycomb and there was even a hole through his head the width of an arm. However, Stiyl Magnus' extremely bored and unenthusiastic voice still continued.

"WHAT ARE YOU SAYING!?"

Extremely stunned, Aureolus continued to fire Limen Magna and Stiyl's tatter upper body was continually pierced and his formerly unharmed lower body was also gaining holes.

"Using basic materials and Germanic Cross to materialize a soul… it really does like something a Roman Catholic priest would do. But, I'm just looking for the real Aureolus Izzard. Will the fake Aureolus please step aside?" Stiyl said, while his body swayed in the air. He gradually became transparent, seemingly about to disappear at any moment, but he continued to remain standing.

“What are you talking about!? These words defy basic premises! Obviously I created Limen Magna. Where else would this power come from?”

“Of course it came from the real Aureolus Izzard. I believe you’re beginning to realize something wrong, right? Alright, let me ask you a question. Fake Aureolus, why did you start to learn alchemy?”

“…Is there even a need to ask?” Aureolus said, raising Limen Magna. “The only aim of alchemy is to seek truth. I specialize in humans. Seeing how high I can go while maintaining a humane concept is the answer I seek."

For example, by consuming a poisonous plant hallucinogen, it was capable to accelerate the speed of assimilating and reciting incantations, even if it caused physical damage. Another example was the possibility to hibernate for thousands of years by entering the frozen mass of the South Pole.

But, what Aureolus sought was not a breakthrough that sacrificed one’s own humanity, but how high humans could climb while maintaining their form and pride. Such was his goal of Aureolus, the descendant of the so-called famous magician-doctor Paracelsus, as an alchemist, which was also his greatest pride.

“If that’s the case, why do you want a vampire, something said to surpass human understanding?”

The words of the magician crushed his beliefs.

“…”

“Hmph. See? You don’t understand. You don’t understand anything. You don’t know what Aureolus Izzard is doing and you don’t know what Aureolus Izzard is thinking of doing. You’re just a fake with basic ideas in your mind that can’t even understand why Aureolus Izzard would go against his fundamental beliefs to do this.”

If he truly knew nothing, how could he have been the true Aureolus Izzard? The magician that should have been physically ravaged spoke with more arrogance than the alchemist

“Also, about that Limen Magna of yours, since magic exists for research, how could Aureolus Izzard be proud to say he completed such a spell? Only a child

would be happy to be cured after taking flu medicine, right?”

“Ugh… Ah…” There were too many arguments for Aureolus to counter. However, Aureolus could not prevent from listening because Stiyl’s words were like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, placing themselves in the deficiencies of the alchemist’s heart. He truly could not ignore him.

“I’ll say it as many times as you like. You’re a fake. I’m looking for the real Aureolus Izzard, not you. Though it’d be easy to destroy one or two of your security functions, I’m not too willing since your face is so familiar. Get as from here as you can.”

The fake Aureolus could take no more. It was not an issue of being a fake. The point was that he had spent immeasurable effort to create that one and only spell, how could it have originated from another person?

The fake Aureolus decided to use his full power to crush the enemy before him, raising his blade.

“Also, you should understand this one clearly. How could the real Aureolus Izzard lose so easily?” said a voice from behind the alchemist. In a moment, a warm, oven-like atmosphere brushed past the alchemist’s face. Then, in a formerly empty place, Stiyl Magnus appeared.

A mirage…?! The fake Aureolus began to back away.

The so-called mirage was a phenomenon caused by thermal expansion that caused light to refract. Thus, it was possible for Stiyl to seemingly melt into the air or cause himself to appear somewhere like a movie projection. Such a fake image was what was repeatedly speared by Limen Magna. The true Stiyl had hidden himself in the air and crept behind Aureolus.

Aureolus thoroughly perceived Stiyl’s tactic in but a moment. It was with such mirages that Stiyl avoided Limen Magna. However, the illusions that were speared seemed to cause mental falsehoods for the alchemist and the moments where the illusion and body overlapped were the most precarious.

If Stiyl stopped to think, he would have been filled with holes.

As the false Aureolus dragged his thought back to reality, a sword of flames

appeared in Stiyl's right hand, which swung vertically and hacked his left hand and leg off. The cuts were extremely smooth, like a hot knife slicing butter. The parts sliced by 3000 Celsius flames did not even bleed.

"Uuah… Ah…" What dominated the alchemist's mind was not the bodily pain.

Also, you should understand this one clearly. How could the real Aureolus Izzard lose so easily? Stiyl's words echoed in his mind and shook it. It was true, Aureolus Izzard was certainly invincible and overwhelming, never knowing either failure or retreat. He could only have been called a perfect saint.

But… what was his currently sorry state? As of then, was he no different from a frightened cat that used all sorts of gimmicks for protection and trembled before attacks?

"A…AAAAAAAHHHHHHHH!!!!!!"

The fake Aureolus finally lost all sanity. Despite his lack of an arm and a leg, the fake alchemist still fired Limen Magna. Stiyl, still wary of the golden dart, raised his flaming sword. However, Limen Magna flew off in a completely different direction, stabbing the students gathered on the floor and causing the entire floor to overflow with molten gold.

Then, Aureolus stabbed Limen Magna into the molten gold, perhaps having the ability to manipulate pure gold like how a magnet attracts iron sand, splattering gold all over. Of course, this included the area around Stiyl Magnus, who responded with casual blocking and a flame-sword explosion. Though the numerous droplets of gold were not blockable, the storm repelled them. Stiyl then created a new sword and sliced apart the smoke surrounding him. He saw no signs of the fake Aureolus, who had possibly escaped during the explosion, and hesitated whether to chase after him, but decided otherwise. The five meter corridor before him was covered in high temperature, lava-like molten gold that would result in burns if the distance was not jumped.

It seemed he could only make a detour, but, lucky for him, Misawa Cram School consisted of four buildings and each was linked through an overhead corridor.

There's nowhere I can't go if I don't mind some detours. Stiyl pondered.

Part 7

“It looks bad but the injuries aren’t serious. Treatment will do.” calmly said Deep Blood Himegami Aisa. Kamijou had dragged the Misawa student, the girl with braids, onto the corridor.

“BU-BUT SHE’S COVERED IN BLOOD!” Kamijou placed the girl on the floor and could not help but roar at Deep Blood’s words. The unknown school’s summer uniform was dyed a fresh red and her face, hands and other visible skin were damaged, looking like a layer of plastic was wrapped over them.

“Only her damaged skin caused damage to the capillaries. Had her arteries ruptured, it would have been worse. The blood would have gushed like a fountain.”

“How… do you…”

You’re not a doctor. And even if you were, you’d need to thoroughly examine this. How can you make a prognosis just like that? Kamijou thought.

“I’m well informed about blood flow than other people.” Kamijou was stunned and automatically recalled the name of Himegami Aisa’s ability.

“Help me!” Kamijou’s reaction went unnoticed, likely because she began emergency treatment and proceeded to undress the wounded girl in front of the boy.

“Uwah! Hold on…”

“Don’t overreact. It’s disrespectful to the injured.”

Though Kamijou was panicked for whatever reason, considering it, it was wrong to think that it was a girl’s naked body. It was similar to how quickly a doctor would be fired if they were excited because of a patient’s naked body. Himegami then, like a doctor or paramedic, used a handkerchief to stop the bleeding and, since it would not suffice for the bleeding wrists, used Kamijou’s belt to tie her wrists. The ruptured abdominal muscles were then stitched together with the

injured girl’s hair and needles from a sewing box.

Kamijou could do little but follow Himegami’s directions and lift the arms higher than her heart or use the handkerchief to press the wounds. Doing such things caused his hands to stain red and, considering it was because of attempts to save a life rather than hurt, caused a rather remarkable feeling for Kamijou.

“Anyways, she’s alright.” Himegami, whose miko outfit was stained with blood, spoke with little impact. “We managed to stop her blood loss. It’ll take 15 minutes for the blood to clot but once it does, the wounds will be patched up. However, the sterilization’s incomplete. Though there won’t be any danger for the next couple hours, it’d be best to send her to a hospital just to be safe.”

“…” Kamijou stared at the injured individual on the floor. She was about Kamijou’s age but her wounds were so sever it was a difficult fact to imagine. Psychology, it was unlikely she was faring any better. It was true that he should have been happy that they saved a life, but, the fact that she had lost everything bothered Kamijou.

“We did what we could. Now… we can only leave it to Academy City’s technology.” He said, still staring. As the wounds were internally caused, her damaged skin stuck to her flesh like damaged plastic sheets.

“It’ll only take plastic surgery. She just needs the skin from her arm.” Himegami Aisa noted with an according knowledge of modern medicine.

“...” However, Kamijou still found it unbelievable that the arm could have been used as a replacement for facial dermis. "Speaking of which, you were amazing just now. Are you a certain doctor that operates without a license?" [2] [2]

“I’m not a doctor.” Himegami continued before Kamijou could ask what she was. “I’m a spellcaster.”

“…” Kamijou recalled that she had previously said something similar. “Eh? On what basis are you a spellcaster?”

“I have a magic wand.”

“O…Oi! Hold on! That’s a police baton!”

“New material.”

“STOP MESSING AROUND.” Kamijou, who was loudly criticizing such ridiculousness, finally realized that he could only do so because the injured person before him was safe.

He collapsed onto the floor, the current activities allowing Kamijou’s tension to be seemingly released. It was an easing feeling in an out-of-the-way, unknown place where many people were killed. It would have even been unsurprising to find someone in tears. Even if they managed to save one or two people, it would have been insignificant compared to the hellish sight.

However, saving a person was still something to be happy with.

“If she needs a hospital…” Regardless of anything else, he could not leave an injured person there. No matter how they intended to deal with Misawa Cram School and Aureolus Izzard, finding an ambulance took first priority. “I’m going back. We can’t leave a wounded person here and it’ll be better to let the ambulance wait at the entrance.”

“Mm. That’s true. Since it’s not just one person, we can save travel time by calling the ambulance here.”

“…Don’t say it like it doesn’t involve you.”

“?” Himegami stared at Kamijou with inexplicability. Perhaps because of her long-term imprisonment, her mind had not considered running away.

“Eh… I meant you don’t have to be locked up in here. Let’s get out of here. In fact, we came here to save you.” Himegami, unresponsive and frozen, revealed a frozen look of surprise. “What is it? Did I say something weird?” “…” Himegami responded softly. “…Why?”

“Why, what? Do I need a reason to save others?”

Himegami, shocked once more, remained stiff with what seemed like a blush, which was perhaps just Kamijou’s imagination.

“But… I…” Himegami Aisa seemed like she had wanted to say something. However, she was then interrupted by the sound of something being dragged

which was followed by the sound of heavy breathing. Kamijou had heard no one speak but still felt the negative feelings of hatred and anger, as if an echo of his mind.

“Damn it! Damn it! Exactly why am I so injured! He’s supposed to be material but he’s dragging me down… Kuku… huhu... dragging me down? Dragging me down? That’s interesting, isn’t it Aureolus Izzard! You don’t even have a leg for others to pull! Kuku! Kukuku! You bastards looked down on me! In the end I’M GOING TO MELT ALL OF YOU…!” said an abnormally loud male voice, sounding like crashing echoes.

With an extremely loud swoosh and the sound of dragging, the man escaped down the stairs and into the corridor. Kamijou was stunned by the green-haired foreigner in a white suit. His left arm and leg were sliced off at the joints and slanted golden sticks were attached the damage parts, serving as crutches. It should have been painful but the man seemed unperturbed. His sweaty, exaggerated face perhaps betrayed the anger, hatred, ecstasy and insanity that served as anesthetic for the man.

Additionally, in each hand, his normal right hand and prosthetic left, were the collars of bloodied boys and girls, three on each for a total of six.

“Wh-What’s going on?”

The man stared at Kamijou with bloodshot eyes. “Kid, what’re you doing here? Only magicians are allow here! Are you an intruder? A friend of that flame magician?”

He was approximately three meters away and continued to allow his saliva to fly. However, Kamijou stood his ground. “You… those people.”

“Of course these are just materials! Alchemy requires materials! Why’re you looking at them? That’s weird! Aureolus Izzard and his Limen Magna stand before you and you’re looking at the materials!? I should be perfect!! Why are you unmoved!?! What do I lack!?”

The name Aureolus Izzard shocked Kamijou, finally caused him to back away. However, Himegami Aisa, beside him, maintained her expression.

“Poor thing… If you hadn’t realized the truth, you could have continued to be

Aureolus Izzard.”

“Ku…!? Damn you!!” With Aureolus’ growl flew a large golden dart from the right sleeve, which quickly spun around the alchemist, the golden chain making some sort of boundary.

The dart pierced through the bloody students that Aureolus had dragged with him. The six students immediately melted into something gold. It was no ordinary fluid. The mercury-like metallic substance’s hissing and the noisy beast-like breathing of the steam proved that the fluid was molten metal.

“Wha— DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT YOU’RE DOING YOU BASTARD?!” Seeing this, Kamijou Touma worried for the melted students, ignoring the murderous technique itself. Aureolus faced Kamijou, seething with anger.

“Of course. ACCEPT YOUR FATE!” Aureolus cried out and the golden dart and chain spun around the alchemist with increasing velocity. Even the surrounding golden dirt flew in mid air like a tornado. It seemed like a wall, yet like a tsunami and yet like a meteor crashing into the sea. It raised waves around Aureolus that extended to the ceiling.

During this, from the corner of his eye, he saw Himegami move. She wordlessly bent down and lifted the injured girl before backing away. Staggering slightly but visibly not anxious, she clearly knew she had to back away and get clear of the attack range.

Luckily, the fluid formed by the spike was different from water. Rather, it was more like sticky, melted chocolate. Even if it were to crash like a tsunami, splash damage would not have been a factor.

Kamijou followed the burdened Himegami’s lead and backed away. Then, a hole appeared in the golden tsunami from whence a golden dart lunged with terrifying speed.

“…!?” Though he would have dodged it, as he was backing off, he could not find proper balance in such short notice. Instead, he chose to use right hand to grab the attack that approached.

The sound of ripping muscles was heard from his hand. The golden dart was not

so easily caught; it retreated and returned to the golden storm. The cut palm felt hot, as if scalded by a metal plate.

After a moment, the golden tsunami began to rise. Kamijou jumped backwards and then rolled, avoiding the molten hot attack. The golden sea separated Kamijou and Aureolus a distance of three meters.

…Ku. Damn it. I have no feeling in my right hand! Kamijou gritted his teeth at the difficulty of clenching his right hand's five fingers. The right hand that could negate any miracle had no power to block a small knife.

"What—What's going on?" After the gold tsunami subsided, Aureolus reappeared, seeming to be more anxious, perhaps even confused, than Kamijou. The golden dart in his hand began to disintegrate like sand.

Kamijou's right hand, Imagine Breaker, began its effect. The dart was something imbued with super natural power, which was destroyed upon contact with his hand. The wound on Kamijou's hand was caused by the blade just before destruction.

"Just what exactly is up with your range hand? Certainly… it won't change? Without question, my Limen Magna is alchemy's pinnacle! It's a miracle that even two schools, Bohemia and Vienna, abandoned thinking it impossible! This is unbelievable! Exactly what did you use to negate my theory!?"

Limen… Magna? Kamijou felt his wound pulsate with his heartbeat. He automatically frowned and analyzed. *By "change" does he mean that molten metal?*

"Ha. How satisfying! Haha! THIS IS SATISFYING. YOU'RE TRULY FASCINATING, BOY! WHAT'S YOUR BODY'S SECRET? LET ME, A MAGIC DOCTOR, DISSECT YOU AND ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS!!!"

Aureolus swung his right hand vertically and revealed a new dart that was pointed at the spot between Kamijou's eyebrows, exacting the killing intent held in his eyes.

He's coming!?

The dart nearly reached his forehead. Kamijou had frantically used his right hand to block his face, swatting the dart aside, causing a sharp, cut-like pain in his own hand.

“Tch!” Aureolus attempted to use his chain to counter, but Kamijou’s right hand shattered it like glass before he could catch it. Another dart appeared from his right sleeve.

Just as Kamijou prepared to dodge, golden darts fired out like machine guns from Aureolus’ suit.

It was fast. The firing, the damaging and preparation for the next each lasted less than a fifth of a second. The level was no longer something a human could handle. However, Kamijou could not simply run away or even turn his back on others. The smallest mistake would have allowed for a dart to lance his chest or other vitals.

Luckily, the dart, though fast, had a relatively simple trajectory. It continued to fire in straight lines which were much easier to predict than the straights and hooks of a boxer.

“Ku! Ahh!!”

Though Kamijou knew he ran the risk of cutting his hand, he could only choose to deflect with Imagine Breaker. Considering the dart’s ability to transform, he would have been melted into gold if he had blocked with anything else. Thus, after some time, the remains of darts and chains surrounded him.

“HAHA! HAHAHAHA! SUCH AN INTERESTING HUMAN SPECIMEN! IT’S NOT EVEN USING A CHANT TO ABSORB THE MAGIC OR A LANCE OF LONGINUS GOD SLAYER! IT USES ITS BARE HAND TO DESTROY MY LIMEN MAGNA!”

Though he was continuously unable to kill his enemy, Aureolus seemed quite ecstatic. He was like an adventurer exploring some mysterious place that none had reached prior.

“IT’S NOT ENOUGH! HAHA! BOY! THIS ISN’T ENOUGH TO TEST YOUR LIMITS!”

The speeds of the golden dart's destruction and regeneration more than doubled, continuously ripping the air and flying at Kamijou.

Kamijou's hand was already stained in blood, unable to even clench into a fist.

Da-Damn it…! MY FINGERS MIGHT GET SLICED! As Kamijou experienced the frightening thought invade his body, a dart unexpectedly missed and whizzed past the slowly moving Kamijou

"The enemy missed" was much too optimistic a thought. Standing behind Kamijou was Himegami Aisa and the injured girl!

"HIME—!"

Kamijou turned his head around and attempted to yell. However, facing where the dart originated, the action was too slow. It was aimed for the area between her eyes. Perhaps Aureolus' extreme mental confusion caused him to not consider showing any mercy for the Deep Blood he had labored to obtain.

Before them was the shocked look of Himegami Aisa's face. Kamijou attempted to shout… but the sound of a dart piercing flesh was heard. In fact, there was a shocked cry whose origin Kamijou was unsure of. He could not tell because the scene before him was much too pitiful and much too unexpected.

The golden dart had not pierced Himegami Aisa.

Instead, the thoroughly injured girl that she was carrying, a girl who could not possibly lift a finger, had actually moved her hand to protect Himegami.

The dart deeply pierced into her soft hand but the girl did not show a look of pain. Instead, she used her other hand to gently push Himegami's chest, swaying her and forcing her one step away from the girl.

She seemed to mutter something with an extremely weak voice. She went unheard… but she smiled.

Rather than a smile for her, it was one for the consoling of others.

Then, the anonymous girl was simply transmuted into flowing gold.

For an instant, Kamijou seemed to shout something. He knew not what he shouted but he had nearly ruptured his throat. The alchemist also seemed taken aback and, likely due to luck (or a lack of it), the golden chain stopped winding.

Kamijou grabbed the chain, not with his sure-kill right hand but instead his left. His instincts told him that only the dart could carry out Limen Magna because, if the chains could, Aureolus would have swung the chain rather than fire the dart because of the extended lateral range.

“Ugh…!” Aureolus naturally attempted to pull the chain back but was held straight like a rope in tug-of-war as Kamijou used his foot to hold it in place. Aureolus himself was the one pulled.

And… in front of him was the fiery liquid gold he had created!

“GUOAHHHHHHHH!!”

Upon stepping into the golden fluid, Aureolus attempted to escape, but could not. The golden chain had become a bind, restricting his movements.

Aureolus roared and released the chain hidden within his suit, managing to eventually drag himself out of the gold. Although the contact was only two seconds, his foot was smoking.

Perhaps understanding he could no longer bind him with the chain, Kamijou’s bloodied hand abandoned it.

Should he run? Or should he attack?

As Aureolus hesitated, he witnessed something unbelievable. Kamijou bent over in an attempt to maximize his jumping distance and jump over the golden stream in order to attack the opposite alchemist.

In truth, the abandonment of the chain had nothing to do with locking Aureolus in place. As for the leaping distance, anyone could have told him it was impossible. The gold stream between them was three meters wide, which was possible with a running start, but impossible starting at rest.

Even so, Kamijou’s eyes lacked hesitation.

It was as if he were saying that even if he were to fail and jumped into the burning gold, then he just had to beat the enemy before him before he was burned.

The intense, unrestrained emotions caused Aureolus his fear.

The next instant, Kamijou jumped without hesitation.

It had seemed like a suicidal jump… but it was not toward Aureolus. Instead, his foot landed on a slightly protruded platform window in the corridor that allowed in the shining sunset; Kamijou flew at him!

"…!"

Kamijou had already jumped before Aureolus could prepare an attack, and from a position much higher than both Aureolus and the floor. The alchemist's survival instincts told him to respond quickly and use a dart to shoot Kamijou out of the air. However, as he rushed to raise Limen Magna, he realized that Kamijou Touma was overhead. If he used Limen Magna, the fiery gold would have rained down.

"Apparently, I didn't foresee this…!"

Actions, pride and a burning foot were all abandoned by Aureolus as he frantically rolled to flee Kamijou's attack. In comparison to the shame of losing to an ordinary person, a non-magician, unendurable damage was a greater fear.

All the alchemist could do was crash about as he ran away on his battered legs, into the darkness.

Part 8

The fake Aureolus continued to tread the corridor's long, seemingly endless distance. After he was grabbed by the boy, he had lost all of his power, which was over all trivial. The golden dart was merely a materialized tool. Limen

Magna’s actual identity was the entire fortress called Misawa Cram School.

Even if the tool’s mana supply were cut off, as long as the main body was supplied with mana and the shape was recreated, it was reusable. Though, this was not the reason for the fake’s escape. The power in the boy’s right hand had seemed limitless. No matter how much mana was placed from the main body into each dart, the right hand still eroded it. If such a cycle had continued, the body would have eventually been depleted of mana, a possible crisis that sent chills down Aureolus’ spine.

"Ku, damn…" The fake Aureolus still planned the next step. Even if Limen Magna itself were ineffective, both Stiyl and the boy had to carefully avoid the molten gold. “…In other words, if there’s so much gold they can’t dodge, they’ll be powerless. Ha. I have 1982 pieces of material in here and naturally, it’ll be more than enough to be rid of them.”

The area of question was large, but it was still a building. If he chose to pour enormous amounts of gold from the top level like water bursting from a dam, he could have easily flooded the levels below. Just imagining it, just imagining it consume his unhappy feelings was enjoyable for the alchemist.

"HAHA! DESTROY DESTROY! DESTROY DESTROY DESTROY DESTROY! THAT'S RIGHT! I CAN'T DIE! THERE'S STILL DEEP BLOOD AND ALL SORTS OF RESEARCH MATERIALS THAT'RE INCOMPLETE! HOW COULD I DIE! NO, THERE’RE MORE! THERE ARE STILL 50,000 HUMAN SPECIMENS IN THE WORLD WORTH RESEARCHING! HAHA! IT’S JUST A PITY THAT THE BOY MUST DIE BEFORE I GET TO UNDERSTAND THE SECRETS OF HIS BODY!"

Fortunately, the alchemist had placed the cram school students on the back of the coin and now he simply had to gather these materials. Once done, all that remained was the trivial matter of piercing Limen Magna through them. Giving it consideration, Stiyl had destroyed the core of the Gregorian Chant replica, the tool that allowed him to manipulate the students’ actions.

“Regardless of anything, these guys are against me…” Anger ripped the air like a burning blade but the sounds of footsteps behind him were even sharper.
“…!?”

Aureolus’ back seemed to visibly shrink as he heard the footsteps. When afraid,

ordinary people would typically choose to run away. It was a normal response. People would choose to run rather than endure irritating and painful events. If possible, they would ignore it.

However, the footsteps disallowed the alchemist even the ability to act on primitive instincts associated with normality. The footsteps contained killing intent, bringing with them despair. If he had turned away, he believed, he would have chopped into 100 pieces. Thus, Aureolus could only seek its source. His heart told him to crazily run away without looking and his mind was already unable to endure the pain. However, like a puppet, the alchemist could only look on.

There, ten meters way, Kamijou Touma stood like a savage beast that had escaped a laboratory.

“Wh-What’s going…” He did not understand. He was supposed to be perfect. How could someone have pushed him so far?

But, Kamijou Touma truly stood there.

“*…Have you had enough fun*?”

Kamijou’s muttering caused Aureolus to frown. It was the voice of one standing in the midst of icy cold rain. Onlookers would have been confused as to who had pushed whom into despair.

Kamijou had seen Hell. He saw people die before him and he understood that somewhere, he knew not where, many had died. But, he had managed to save just one injured girl. The alchemist before him had taken away his heart’s one saving grace. Kamijou spoke not of this for if he had the time to speak, the efforts were better spent elsewhere. His eyes glared at his enemy a look filled with the iron inferno of murder.

“Ugh...” Aureolus disorderedly raised Limen Magna out of pure fear, which gave Kamijou even more determination.

Wordlessly, his feet dashed, or rather exploded, with all his might towards the alchemist. Consumed by fear and anxiety, Aureolus fired the dart at Kamijou’s face to keep him from approaching. In response, Kamijou crouched like a spider and easily dodged, even taking an additional step at the same time.

“!?”

The alchemist’s nervousness rose. However, even if his restlessness caused Limen Magna to be less effective, he could still prepare six in a single second. He recovered the dart and once again fired at the boy’s face.

Having already bent down, Kamijou had nowhere to go. He used his right fist to land an uppercut into the alchemist’s abdomen, shattering the dart and chain in the same stroke. The perfect counterattack had seemingly predicted the dart’s path.

Crouching down was a ploy. If there were no retreat options coupled with a large opening, the enemy would predictably attack. Thus, the straightforward trajectory was much too simple compared to the rule-less alleyway brawls. With a distance of ten meters, just dodging the first dart would not have covered the distance. Kamijou had devised this tactic as a way to dodge second attack.

And… if he could do it…

“Wait!” With a stunned, twisted expression, Aureolus roared in an attempt to fire a third. However, before it could happen, Kamijou’s fist had found its way to the alchemist’s face. Then, without slowing down, despite the one-head difference in height, Kamijou smashed his forehead into Aureolus’ jaw.

Having taken two direct strikes to the head, Aureolus stumbled to the floor. He attempted to roll away but Kamijou did not allow. He stamped heavily onto the gold prosthetic and maneuvered his foot to remove it. With the sound of crushing fruit, the wound, which was given makeshift treatment, ripped.

“GYYYYAAAAAAAAH!!!” Aureolus screamed in pain and shot another Limen Magna at Kamijou, who was about to sit on the alchemist.

Despite the risk, Kamijou used his left hand to grab the golden chain in order to keep it intact. It seemed he had not considered that the slightest mistake would have turned him into gold.

He twisted his left hand and tied the golden chain to his arm. Once Limen Magna was completely sealed, Kamijou looked down upon the alchemist.

Idiotic… if this keeps up I’ll be killed. Aureolus' better judgment had him cut the

golden chain linked to the inside of his suit. Having previously balanced his balance with the chain's resistance, Kamijou swayed. Utilizing this opportunity, Aureolus rolled away and escaped Kamijou's clutches. The alchemist cried in his own heart. Rather than the Limen Magna he so believed in be destroyed, he had abandoned it of his own will, questioning his entire belief system.

He had believed that he could save his life if he abandoned everything, which would have been for nothing if it failed. However, Aureolus could not walk, let alone run, with his prosthetic leg ripped out.

Kamijou raised the golden chain and whipped the crawling Aureolus. The heavy hit caused the air to leave his lungs, causing him to roll about on the floor in pain.

"…"

Kamijou silently closed in on the alchemist and stepped on his back, proceeding to wrap the chain around its former master's neck. He could have then hanged him by pulling on the chain. What he could not do was break the neck because Kamijou was right-handed, not left. The boy was not acting on emotion, simply because he could not. His mind was infuriated and blank, reality having little hold.

"I—gya—sp-spare—me."

The words seemed to douse Kamijou's brain in cold water, clearing him of his anger. It was an unreasonable request. How many had he killed? Considering how many, there was only one option. Even in superhero movies with special effects that were shown to children, none would have hesitated to kill such a person.

But, Aureolus was inhuman. He knew he could not run, but he continued to stretch his arms to struggle.

Kamijou began to recall the knight, abandoned in the hall, the students who still continued incanting the Gregorian Chant, damaging their own bodies, and the anonymous girl who was morphed into gold because she protected Himegami. He knew there was only one option.

Kamijou wordlessly tugged at the golden chain… but… in the end chose to let

go.

Aureolus crawled away on the floor, only capable of escaping the boy who had caused his downfall, wondering what misfortunes befell him. He was relieved to be living.

He was still human, how could Kamijou have killed him?

The fake Aureolus no longer even knew what floor it was. Though he managed to tumble down a few floors, he no longer had the strength to crawl. His body no longer had the energy. His back rested against the wall of the dark emergency staircase while he stared at his remaining hand.

Since he was punched by the boy, he felt like the strength that supported him was being taken away. The sense of powerlessness told him that a certain mana source was cut off.

It was then that the fake Aureolus realized. He was not human. If the existence that provided him energy ceased to exist, he could not even stand. He was like Limen Magna, a tool amongst numerous substitutes.

"Ahh…" The alchemist sighed as the feeling in his fingers gradually faded. He somehow felt satisfied.

What is this? Whether it's Limen Magna or this body, magic is negated on contact. What is that boy's right hand? Thinking of such things, the alchemist was like a teenager looking through a telescope, his eyes sparkling with the thirst for knowledge.

The greatest question in his heart appeared: How much humanity can you maintain while you raise existence and pride?

Aureolus seemed to find his answer. Though the boy's abnormal power was a part of it, it was the fact that, though he had such power, he still grew angered and saddened like a human.

Considering it, his tragic fate seemed meaningless. A scholar who found his final answer had no reason to live on and think.

Footsteps…

He weakly looked up the stairs and found Stiyl standing there.

“Naturally I can see that… you haven’t gotten tired of killing me?” said the self-mocking alchemist. “Even if you leave me alone, I’ll certainly die anyways. Why do you still want to kill me?”

“Yeah. It’s true I have no interest in killing you. Besides, that child didn’t interact with you.” Stiyl responded with disinterest. “Speaking of which, a member of the 13 Knights was killed. I suppose you didn’t do that, right?”

The fake Aureolus continued to lean and continued to stare up. His weapon was Limen Magna. Though he could not turn anything and everything into gold, it could not have possibly forced the enchanted knight’s armor into that dented shape.

“…Hmph, speaking of that… Certainly, I never killed any of them.”

“What?”

“Inevitably, I lost. You can go ahead and think of the reason.” Aureolus said with a smirk. “Speaking of which, since you’re not interested in me, why’re you here? Naturally, can’t I die alone?”

“It’s the complete opposite you idiot. I’m here to send you off. Could you endure dying by yourself like this?”

“…” For some time, the alchemist stared blankly at Stiyl.

Then, he smiled.

It was a rarity for the man, but he smiled. Though a fake, he was a scholar and, as of then, was extremely satisfied that he had managed to obtain the answer to humanity’s highest limit.

There was still some time until he died, less than ten minutes.

He was a scholar. In the remaining time, he would think of a new question to ponder, perhaps a research topic waiting for him.

However, the alchemist lacked the time to ponder. For a scholar, it was Hell to

have doubts that were not researchable before death. It was an unavoidably unhappy feeling of regret.

It was also why Stiyl spoke.

“Before you find that sweet question and ponder hard, let me send you off while your goals are complete.”

“Hmph.” Aureolus smiled. “I can’t tell if you’re an angel or the devil.”

“Those two are similar beings that only differ from whom they take their orders from.” Stiyl slowly walked down the stairs. “I prove why my name is the strongest. Fortis931.” Stiyl’s black coat writhed and numerous runic carts scattered about like sakura petals.

“Magic name, huh?” muttered Aureolus as Stiyl walked down the stairs. What was his magic name? The alchemist began to recall. “Oh. I remember.”

My honor is for the world—Honos628.

Having finally remember his name and purpose, the alchemist’s eyes narrowed.

“Do I need to make a final prayer for you as a priest, alchemist?” Down the stairs, Stiyl Magnus spoke as he arrived before the man.

“Stop dragging this out. You’re just a magician.”

The moment the fake Aureolus replied, Stiyl’s flames entered him through the mouth, quickly consuming the inside of his body. The flames burst out from every opening and the abdomen shattered, splitting him in two. Copious flames continued to burst out and Aureolus’ upper body shot out like a rocket.

Part 9

In a certain student dormitory, or rather, a certain student dormitory’s bathtub, the girl named Index, watching over the house, was exchanging looks with the

stray cat named Sphinx. The calico cat seemed an indoor cat, lacking a cute personality. It did not chase after thrown balls of yarn, nested under tables even after being called and snatched people's food while they ate. The final point was significant to Index, who had a voracious appetite, and to Kamijou Touma, who cooked for her.

It seemed imperative that she train it. Having decided to abandon the loving treatment, she now battled the bubble covered calico cat. As a side note, Index read through Kamijou's elaborate explanation of how to operate the bathroom's automatic hot water supply and had gingerly figured it out.

…But, where did Touma go?

A few questions rested in her mind. The first was from during the conversation. It was not because Kamijou had said that he had wanted to test whether the phone would work but rather when Kamijou had so easily forgiven that she had eaten his pudding.

Speaking of which, it was the same for the shampoo-bubble covered cat whose fur was standing up. To put it simply, Kamijou did not do what he did not want to do. Even if he knew there was no other way, if he truly did not want to do it, he would pursue an alternative.

It was truly odd that Kamijou had not pursued those two things that he disagreed with.

Having decided, Index nodded her head. She exited the bathroom and donned her habit, the Walking Church. At the corridor, before she even opened the door, she realized that even if she wanted to question Kamijou, she had to know where he was. Of course, calling was not an option. In all honesty, Index knew not how to operate the phone and since Kamijou's residence phone had a faxing function, there were so many buttons that Index did not know where to begin.

Would she give up? As Index considered returning to the room, she noticed what appeared to be a tarot card stuck on the wall. It was the runic imprint that the magician Stiyl Magnus utilized.

"…" Index stared at the card with distrust. Something was happening. Kamijou had surely gone alone to deal with something.

Index recalled that a few days ago, she had met the feeling-less teenager. Despair and anxiety caused Index restlessness.

Run. She could only run.

Luckily, with the knowledge of 103,000 grimoires, she understood the workings of Stiyl's magic. The runes required the magician to continuously provide mana to maintain it.

For example, when a soul is lost, a thin string-like something would link the soul and body. Though Index could not use magic, she could trace the mana to prevent from getting lost.

And, like that, Index ran off for the battlefield while neglecting to even lock the door.

She did not know that that action would bring about the worst consequences.

Chapter 3: The Master Has Shut Off the World Like a God. *DEUS_EX_MACHINA*.

Part 1

Stiyl Magnus journeyed for the top floor of the North block. Perhaps Kamijou, whom Stiyl had used as bait, was attracting many more enemies than he had predicted as Stiyl faced essentially no resistance. He hid himself completely, checked every secret entrance, and formed a grasp of the building's situation.

It seemed Deep Blood Himegami Aisa was not imprisoned inside. Having checked the dust and mana traces left behind at the entrance, it seemed that whether it the front or back of the coin, no one had entered.

There was no one, no subordinates, no soldiers or not even Aureolus himself, an environment that would not monitor an escaping prisoner. If such an event occurred, it would have become much more complicated, meaning that Himegami Aisa was not in fact imprisoned but willingly assisting Aureolus Izzard. If it were so, it seemed Stiyl had to face the terrifying and unknown power called Deep Blood.

…*Damn it. Why are espers so hard to handle.* Having such thoughts, Stiyl's mind wandered to the boy that was used as bait. If the boy died, it would have meant little to Stiyl. From the beginning, Stiyl had told him that they were not allies and clearly stated the boy was a shield. However, when the boy was pushed down, he had seemed so betrayed.

It was the expression of someone backstabbed.

"..."

He had attacked him with a flame sword on their first meeting and had even dragged him to that deadly battlefield. Why did the boy see him as a comrade?

Stiyl was uneasy. Though just a small irritant, it caused Stiyl some uneasiness. … *Damn it. Why are espers so hard to handle!*

Stiyl began to dash down the narrow emergency staircase. Considering he had used him as bait, such an action was futile. However, Stiyl could not appease his conscience unless he did something with some impact. The remains of Stiyl's humanity argued back.

"I don't understand. Why are you so anxious?" inquired an icy voice behind Stiyl.

"…" Stiyl slowed turned his head. He knew what would have happened if he let an enemy sneak behind him.

Behind Stiyl Magnus stood…

"Hm. So it's over here?" As orange sunset melded with purple night, Index arrived before Misawa Cram School, whose normalness made it seem strange. Index had tracked the owner of the runes stuck to the student dormitory. However, it seemed the mana trail disappeared once it entered the building.

To be blunt, it was an obviously abnormal building that feigned normality. Its intentions were clear.

Like how individuals had mana, the world had "power."

Christians called the existence God's Blessings. The creation of the Golden Dawn organization mapped the blueprint of Western magic called Telesma. In terms of contemporary language, the most similar were the geography and astronomy of Feng Shui. As the name would suggest, a pulse formed from the forces and flows of the entire world that formed blood vessels extending everywhere.

It was similar to how mana formed from human life force, similar to gasoline refined from crude oil. Similarly, the energy spread out over the planet was not

too powerful (at least relatively. The lifespan of planetary objects could not be compared to that of a human's and thus the "power" was much larger than human mana.). Through a temple or shrine, it was possible to convert this power into a "planetary energy", generating huge sums of energy.

The power filled the world like air and ordinary people (magicians included as well) could not feel it. Only specially trained magicians or Feng Shui masters could see the force. However, there was no such energy in the four buildings before Index.

Though the power of the world was normally undetectable like basic air, if a vacuum formed, breathing became impossible. Similarly, Index felt an incomparable strangeness.

It was like some tower of death was sliced into cubes, becoming the largest tombstone in the world. It was much too extreme, even if for the sake of trapping mana inside.

Though Kamijou's right hand was capable of destroying the world's power, it was not a large problem. If the power returned to the soil like falling leaves, it rejoined the cycle of life in the form of destruction, perfectly natural. Before Index realized the Walking Church's destruction, she had not realized how harmonious the hand was with nature.

However, the magic tower differed. It was like a city of stone and steel formed after cutting down a forest through forced methods. It was an ugly representation of urbanization.

Had the rune magician not realized? It was perhaps because the rune magician was a walking refinery of vast amounts of mana. Similar to how people react to eating foods with strong tastes, slight changes in flavor went undetected. In contrast, Index, who could not refine mana, clearly felt the slight change.

"This isn't a boundary preventing enemies from invading but a boundary to prevent escape. Hm… It's like an Egyptian pyramid…" muttered the white nun and walked through the automatic doors.

Index had no reason to head back. In face of such an abnormal existence, she had ever more reason to bring the boy home.

The moment she stepped inside, she felt the difference in the atmosphere. It felt like she had walked from under the scorching sun into a shop with a hyperactive air conditioner. The lively and peaceful street had become a cold-blooded battlefield with the ominous presence of permeating death. It was not a false impression for, deep inside the expansive room, at a wall near the lifts was a dead knight donned with Roman Catholic tools.

Index cautiously approached the knight and observed him. The knight's tool, the enchanted suit Surgical Armor was imbued with magic that absorbed physical strikes. As the emphasis was focused on physical defense, the equipment was frailer against magic attacks. However, the enchanted armor was forcefully destroyed by a powerful physical attack. Someone had ignored the defensive attribute.

…Either someone doesn't know anything about magic or he's just really crazy.

Of course, examining the building that was similar to a pharaoh's tomb, the former was impossible. In which case, the situation was troublesome. Those capable of destroying the enchanted Roman Catholic armor with pure physical force were either those capable of summoning archangels or metal golem specialists.

Then, she heard the sound of something clashing. Index looked back and found, beside the elevator, the entrance to an emergency staircase. There seemed to have been the sound of dragging and heavy breathing.

"Who's…" Before she could finish her question, the thing climbed out of the emergency staircase.

It could not have been called human or object. It was no longer human. Its lower half was ripped, its left arm blown to smithereens, and its face's right side blown off. Even its remaining left side was charred. Such a thing could not have been called human.

The half of its remaining face was still moving. Unbelievably, it seemed the head tilted with thought. As Index began to think of something unimportant, it used a hand to support itself in preparation to leap.

"…!"

Without a word, it leaped. Index could only frantically backtrack and trip and tumble over the remains of the knight. The thing seemingly lost its target and seemed to be positioned to land on Index.

“Be crushed!” A stern man’s voice was heard in the icy expanse.

The wall near the elevator ripped apart like paper and a man’s hand emerged from within. The large hand grasped like it was catching a ball and found the charred head of the thing.

Then, before Index lying on the floor, the thing’s body shattered as the man had declared. Like gathered ash being crushed, with a “pak!” three cracks appeared on the thing’s body, beginning to break into pieces. It then exploded into something like snow-flakes that disappeared before touching Index’s face.

“Open!” The voice was heard once more and the immobile elevator doors ripped open from the inside. The twisted elevator that should not have opened, did. It was an ultimate magic that forced the user’s surroundings to morph according to his words.

“Don’t tell me…”

Facing the puzzled, mumbling Index, a tall, lean man exited the elevator, appearing careless. His green hair was combed back and he wore a white Italian suit and high class leather shoes.

“Hm. It’s been a while, but I don’t think you remember me. Inevitably, you can’t remember the name Aureolus Izzard. But, to me, this might be somewhat lucky.” Said the man who had numerous mosquito-bite like marks on his head.

It was acupuncture, an Asian healing technique that seemed out of place with Westerners. In truth, this was false pretense. For example the founder of Golden Dawn, a Western magic organization, loved Buddhist concepts.

“But, even if you don’t remember, I shall say what I need to. It’s been a while Index. It seems you’ve forgotten me but I’m quite happy to see you haven’t changed.” He said as he reached his hand out, blocking Index’s eyes. It was the hand of a human or perhaps a monster that crushed the charred creature.

Index could not move as she responded. “Do-Don’t tell me… the Golden Ars

Magna?”

The man responded with a soft smile.

Part 2

“Let’s go home.” Kamijou said. Unable to get past the flowing gold, Kamijou could only make a detour through the four buildings and return to Himegami. “I beat that guy called Aureolus. I didn’t kill him but he’s done. He can’t fight, he’s wounded and his heart’s broken.”

So, go home.

There was nothing left to protect. The students that took part in the Gregorian Chant could not be saved and he ended up dueling the alchemist. There lacked any reason for Kamijou to remain there. He himself desired to escape that battlefield filled with death and return home.

He wanted to go home and he wanted to have dinner with Index. It would be alright so long as he escaped Misawa Cram School.

If I could just see her, I could return to the normal world. Before I’m stuck here, before I get used to a world of murder and death… If I can’t go back it’s over. He realized blankly and ever so clearly.

A devil appeared in Kamijou’s fragile heart.

First, according to Stiyl, Index had to have her memory wiped every year.

Second, according to Stiyl, Index found a new partner every year.

Finally, according to Stiyl, Index was completely ignorant.

Easily imaginable, the Index who smiled years past was not the Index that Kamijou knew. There were too many around Index that needed her.

He had not explicitly said it, but Stiyl did imply it when he had said “this does not mean we have given up and are leaving her to you.”

“…” A sudden feeling of grogginess forced Kamijou to support himself with his hand. He felt that if he treated that child just like any other person, he would be unable to return to his ordinary life.

…*Such an ugly and possessive thought.*

In such critical circumstances, thoughts of self defeat could easily become self-sacrifice or other suicidal actions. Kamijou took a deep breath and calmed himself, forcing himself not to think in such a way. He had realized that if such thoughts continued, his mind would have crumbled.

Anyways… I’d better get Himegami out of here. Kamijou sighed with a thought.

“That Aureolus Izzard was a fake.” Himegami Aisa said matter-of-factly.

“What?”

“He was just a clone. I’ve seen the real one before so I can tell. The real one wouldn’t kill so indiscriminately.”

Each word she spoke etched into Kamijou’s thoughts. It was true. Analyzing carefully, something was wrong. The alchemist had certainly used Misawa Cram School as a fortress but had for some reason self-destructed the students with the Gregorian Chant? If it were the case, would he not have broken his disguise?

Even with such analysis, Kamijou was unwilling to believe reality. He could not calmly think because what remained of his sanity was the fact that he would finally go home. He could not simply accept that he had to step back into the battlefield.

“Hold on! Hold it right there…! What do you mean? I just beat Aureolus Izzard!”

“Like I said, he was a fake.” She responded quickly. “The real body has many needles to stab with. The ones without needles are definitely fake, not to mention the real one isn’t that weak.”

Kamijou could not admit to it and neither did he want to. His thoughts were focused on going home and he was wholly unwilling to accept another enemy's existence.

"The real one is only interested in what he wants. I don't think he'd stop you if you went home." Himegami's calming tone finally soothed Kamijou's rampaging mood. However, something she said seemed strange.

"Hold on. You're coming with me aren't you? Since he wants you, why would he let us go?"

"Why?"

"Why, what?"

"The question isn't 'why can't he let us go'. It's 'why should I go with you?'"

"What?" Kamijou, confused, could say little more. Even if they defeated all enemies, Himegami did not intend to escape from Misawa Cram.

"Don't be mistaken. I'm here of my own accord. I don't plan to escape from here. On the contrary, my goal can only be achieved here. Without that alchemist, it's possible it might never be fulfilled." Rather than sound lost, Himegami may have even sounded like Aureolus' friend.

What's going on? There are psychological cases where imprisoned or monitored hostages have felt mysterious sympathy for criminals. Is Himegami like that?

"No matter what your aims, the guy doesn't consider you an ally, right? And if you are one, why are you imprisoned here?"

"I was imprisoned before he took command of Misawa Cram." She said with resolve. "Do you really want to know how I was treated here? Do you want to know why there are so many secret rooms? I don't think you could handle the truth."

"..."

"Ever since the alchemist came, the secret rooms were never used again. I'm just staying here. I don't feel the need to go outside. If I did randomly go out, I'd

attract ‘them.’”

Kamijou remembered what Stiyl had told him prior to their invasion. Though it seemed like an ordinary building, it possessed a perfectly disguised barrier.

Deep Blood: a legend of even the magic world. A girl was said to possess the ability to instantly kill vampires. Perhaps…

“What do you mean? Don’t tell me you hide here to avoid conflicts with them?”

“…My blood has the power to attract them with a sweet scent and also kill them. Lure them, kill them. I’m like a carnivorous plant: colorful and deadly. Such is my nature.”

Kamijou’s eyes widened. Even when Stiyl simply mentioned vampires, he was filled with fear and disgust and now, he knew Himegami Aisa truly had the powerful ability to kill vampires. However, Himegami’s words sounded lonely. It was as if she were standing in the cold rain.

"Do you know what vampires are like?" Kamijou could not possibly answer. All he could think of were evil vampires in fiction who attacked humans. In fact, the term vampire itself seemed unrealistic.

“I don’t.”

“They’re no different from us. They cry, smile, get angry, get happy, laugh for others, and act for others. All of these people—without exception—are killed.” Himegami replied with words that only those who had seen Hell could say. She sounded like her heart bled. Her happy memories had been shattered.

“Academy City researches powers. I thought I could come here to analyze the secrets of my powers. If I knew its source I could get rid of it. However, I couldn’t find a way to be rid of it.” Himegami said. “I don’t want to kill anyone. I’d decided that I’d rather kill myself than kill other people.”

Such was the reason that the girl titled Deep Blood agonized alone.

“But that…”

“Please don’t try to convince me otherwise. It’s not so bad. Aureolus said that he

could create a simply boundary that takes the appearance of clothes, called the Walking Church. If I put it on, I can go outside without the fear of luring ‘them.’”

"..."

“I have my goals and Aureolus has his. We need each other to fulfill them. So, it’s okay. Aureolus will fulfill his end of the bargain and keep me safe. I’ll explain it to Aureolus for you if you want to leave this battlefield.” Kamijou could not consent. He did not understand the burden she bore. He did not know how to save her. He did not know what to do.

“Tell me something.” He asked because he did not know. “If you don’t want to attract vampires, why were you eating outside when we first met?”

“Simple. Aureolus needs me because he wants a vampire. If I stay inside this boundary, I can’t attract one.”

“Isn’t that the opposite of what you want? Don’t you want to stop hurting vampires? If you do, why would you accept that ord—”

“Yes. But, Aureolus promised me he wouldn’t hurt it after he captured one. He just wants their help.”

“…What? I thought you had worked hard just to escape Misawa Cram.”

“Even if I had intended to escape, why are you here?”

“I’m here to save you of course. Do I need any other reason?”

Himegami’s eyes widened at his argument. It was like she had gotten a birthday present even she had forgotten what day it was. “Unbelievable. But don’t worry, I wasn’t imprisoned. You can relax and go home, no problem.” She smiled. “Aureolus said he wants to save someone and can’t do it by himself. That’s why he needs a vampire and also why I agreed to help. This’s the first time I agreed to use this power to save, not kill.”

“...”

Were her words true? Even if Himegami were not lying, it was unknown

whether Aureolus was noble. After all, Aureolus was a murderer and mastermind who had created that battlefield of carnage. Her words contradicted the situation.

And, even if Aureolus Izzard was as she said…

“...This won’t do.”

“?"

“If in fact Aureolus Izzard is as you say, that he isn’t a monster, that he’s still barely human, you can’t let him keep doing these terrible things. Though I think people can be saved when they fall, if Aureolus continues like this, he’ll reach a point of no return.”

She remained silent. In truth, she had already realized. Aureolus’ desires had begun to diverge from reality. Simply looking at the battlefield itself showed that the truth differed substantially from “not hurting anyone.”

“On exactly what basis do you refute my ideas?” said a male voice that interrupted Kamijou.

A mysterious ringing permeated their conversation, forcing both silent. It was like a whisper to the ear, though the owner of the voice had transferred the vibrations not through air but through something metaphysical.

The footsteps clacked behind Himegami in a corridor 30 meters away.

No one should have been there. No one should have been there. But, in the blink of an eye, Kamijou witnessed a man appear before him. Surely there were no places to hide. Not to mention, the man had never hid.

“You…” Kamijou began to distrust his very own eyes.

The man that suddenly appeared was the Aureolus Izzard that Kamijou had beaten down. His limbs were intact and he had not a single scratch.

Did he use some special power to heal? Kamijou considered it but deemed it illogical. Regardless of physical healing, one’s personality would remain constant. Like a twin brother with a completely different persona, the person

before him was identical but possessed a wholly different atmosphere.

Not to mention the pressure… He was thirty meters away but Kamijou felt an overwhelming sensation as if the enemy had already stabbed his ribs.

Despair. The only suitable description of that man was power.

Dangerous! His instinct warned him. *This person is dangerous! He's someone that definitely can't be beaten while in this building.*

Because of the warning, Kamijou took a step forward to protect Himegami. From the beginning, sacrificing someone to save himself was never an option.

"Calm down. Don't interfere. **I will go there now.**"

Before Kamijou could take even a step forward, Aureolus Izzard had covered the entire 30 meter distance between them.

“What…?”

With Aureolus’ sudden appearance, Kamijou’s mind froze with incomprehension. Rather than fast, he had appeared out of nowhere like a scene change in movies.

“Naturally, you’re wondering what happened. However, I have no obligation to answer.” The alchemist said with calm.

“Himegami’s blood is very important so I can’t hand her over. I’m here to reclaim her.”

The word “reclaim” swirled in Kamijou’s confused mind. “You bastard!”

How could he run away? He had to close the two meter distance between them and rescue the imprisoned Himegami from the mastermind Aureolus. He rushed forward.

“In any case… **You,**” The alchemist calmly began. “**shall not touch me.**”

The change was drastic.

Initially, nothing changed, which was the source of the strangeness. Kamijou had rushed at Aureolus with maximum force. However, the distance did not lessen, as if he were chasing the setting sun on the horizon. Run and run and run but the two meters did not disappear.

Like a corridor expanding into infinity, Aureolus and Himegami seemed to retreat from him. With a sense of anxiousness, Kamijou remembered the existence of Imagine Breaker in his right hand. Any supernatural power would be negated, even one of God’s miracles.

But how exactly am I supposed to use this effectively!?

“Tell me exactly,” said Aureolus emotionlessly. “Why I can’t turn back?”

Kamijou, chilled, stopped. He dared not approach the alchemist, his body warning him of the danger of approaching. Aureolus stared at Kamijou without feeling like a toy insect staring with pins.

Without warning, Aureolus procured from his white suit a thin needle as thin as hair that smelled faintly of antiseptic. Aureolus stabbed the needle into his neck as if to hypnotize himself.

Kamijou backed away from this declaration of Kamijou's death. However, Aureolus removed then needle and tossed it aside. "Unfortunately, you're an uninteresting boy."

Then, Kamijou shockingly realized that, regardless of his efforts, he could not retreat from Aureolus. In a mysterious predicament, Kamijou could move neither forward nor backward. His heart nearly burst with his inability to act as Aureolus silently reached his hand to grab something far away from Kamijou's heart, as if to dig it out. "**Diss—**" began the stern alchemist.

"Hold on a minute!" Himegami had suddenly appeared between them and interrupted the alchemist. Kamijou was amazed that Himegami had dared to actually stand between them to protect him from the true alchemist with overwhelming power.

Idiot…! Don't!

Kamijou hurriedly reached a hand out to push her away but could not move approach even a single centimeter. Like a child confronting an assailer with a machine gun, Kamijou trembled from the fear danger.

Then, Kamijou remembered her title: Deep Blood.

Her legendary, mysterious power killed the vampires that even Stiyl so feared. With her power, as the strongest ace, they could perhaps turn around the situation.

Don't tell me… Please tell me she has a chance. If she doesn't… she shouldn't be doing this…

Aureolus glanced at the thinking Kamijou with disinterest. He seemed to lack a regard for his trump, Deep Blood. "Obviously, at this point, you might harbor a sense of hope, which is expected. However, Deep Blood is no match for me." Aureolus said coldly. "Naturally, you might wonder how the name Deep Blood came to be. Hm. Yes. She certainly has the power to kill vampires… but have you ever wondered, considering it's so powerful, why it's limited to vampires?

Why don’t they call her Overkill Annihilator?”

…*Don’t tell me.*… With his final hope snatched, Kamijou’s thought processes simplified.

“Essentially, Deep Blood is an ability exclusively effective on vampires. The truth is none so extravagant. It’s simply a unique type of blood. Her sweet-smelling blood lures vampires to her and when they consume but a drop of her blood, they disintegrate. The terrifying thing is the fact that it lures each and every vampire. They drink her blood knowing they will die. It’s only effective against Cain’s descendants, vampires; not humans.” Aureolus elaborated as he obtained another needle, stabbing this one as well into his neck. What was its effect? The rather emotionless alchemist seemed somewhat excited. “Hm? Are you going to retort by attacking me? How are you any different from me? In the end, you’re just like me. You need Deep Blood.”

His words carved their way into Kamijou’s heart. Kamijou knew the despair but he also wanted to struggle until the willpower in his heart disappeared.

“That’s not true. This person didn’t know the definition of Deep Blood or even what vampires are like. He came here to save a stranger he met this morning. We haven’t even been formally introduced but he wouldn’t leave me behind.” The person who said this to Aureolus was Himegami, not Kamijou. She widely spread her arms, becoming a shield and warding away the verbal attacks. "Aureolus Izzard, what is it that you want?"

Himegami’s words caused Aureolus’ eyebrows to twitch. “Are you going to get ordinary people, neither magicians nor alchemists, involved and kill them so regularly? Is this going to satisfy you? Is this your goal?”

“…”

“If it’s such a meaningless objective, then I shall quit. I know I can’t defeat you, but I have the right to decide whether to bite my own tongue and end my life.” Her eyes never broke the honest expression of patience. It was almost difficult to discern who the king of the fortress was.

Once again, he pulled out a needle and stabbed his neck. “Essentially, we don’t have time to waste on such things.” He said with casualness. “There’re too many things to deal with. Dealing with Index is much more troublesome than the

intruder. It's simple to defeat others but it's not something I handle well."

Aureolus' nonchalant words had nearly caused Kamijou to stop breathing. *Hold on. Hold on. Index? Don't tell me… she came here?!*

The infinite distance between them prevented Kamijou from grabbing Aureolus and changing the dire situation. The hand that the alchemist had lowered was raised again and Himegami, with a defiant look, stepped toward Aureolus.

"Don't worry, I won't kill him." He said easily as he removed the needle. "Young man: **as for what happened here…**"

Damn it! What kind of sick joke is this!? I can't back away now!

The alchemist, apparently seeing through Kamijou's heart, smiled. "**…Forget everything.**"

Part 3

The sun had set.

"…?" Kamijou rose from the seat and looked around himself. Seat? He found that he was inside a student bus that apparently did not go in the direction of Kamijou's dormitory. The final stop on the bus wrote "17th District: Before Misawa Cram School." Typically speaking, the final busses stopped running at 6:30. It was possibly a cram school bus considering it was rare for buses to travel at midnight.

"Misawa Cram?" Kamijou's head tilted. Was that the name of the cram school? Kamijou pondered it but found no answer. He himself could not have been a cram school student; Kamijou Touma could not write his holiday assignments let alone prepare for exams.

The term memory loss sent chills down Kamijou's spine. He had thought that it was simply memory loss of previous experiences, but, as things stood, it may

have been much worse than he had expected.

"…Better check it out at the hospital." While muttering to himself, Kamijou decided to first get off the bus for he knew not where it was headed. After exiting at the nearest stop, Kamijou found that he was unfamiliar with the surrounding scenery.

He physically felt relatively balanced and was wide awake. At first glance, he seemed very healthy but it seemed safer to do a check-up at a hospital considering he had lost several hours of memories.

If I go to the hospital I'll need my health insurance card. Better go home first. Are hospitals still open right now? Do I need to call for emergency services? Wait, how am I going to explain this to Index? Wouldn't she be suspicious if I wanted to go to the hospital all of a sudden? Would she be angry that she hasn't eaten dinner this whole time…? His mind swirling about, Kamijou walked to his dormitory since there were no buses at that time going in that direction.

Such misfortune.

He felt like something was calling out to him.

…?

Kamijou bent his head with puzzlement. It was strange. Why did he feel like he had forgotten something important? It was like forgetting to turn off the stove before going on holiday, that sort of irresolvable danger.

What's going on? Kamijou thought about the Misawa Cram School that he had never been to and muttered.

"Nevermind. If I can't remember, it's probably not important."

With that conclusion, he continued forward. As of that moment, the most important thing was to calm down Index, who would likely be angry and starving. It seemed his only option was the 700 yen black honey pudding.

I really shouldn't've bought that 3600 yen reference book. Kamijou sighed and scratched his head with his right hand...

…His right hand that could negate any supernatural power, even a Godly miracle…

PAKIN! With the sound of his skull shattering, the entire day's memories rushed into his mind.

"…!" Kamijou erratically looked around and only found a scene cloaked in the night's darkness. Considering the station's distance, he could no longer see Misawa Cram School from where he was. How long had it been? He could not find Stiyl, Himegami or Aureolus and—of course— Index.

Aureolus had said "forget everything" and Kamijou had truly forgotten everything. He forgot the Misawa Cram School that became a battlefield, Himegami being taken away by Aureolus and also what the alchemist said about Index.

"DAMN IT!"

The last few hours were completely lost. *Even alone, Stiyl's probably okay in there, right?* With him coming to mind, Kamijou began to run towards Misawa Cram School.

During his run, Kamijou, whose mind was in disarray, had noticed that he had not met anyone else along the way; in fact no one else was on the road aside from him. Even if it were afterhours, it was downtown Academy City. It was unnatural to not have met a single person.

…What's going on?

By the time Kamijou had noticed the abnormality, he was already within visible sight of Misawa Cram School. An absence of people was something Kamijou had experienced before due to the Opila runes that Stiyl had utilized the previous evening.

However, this time, rather than an absence of people, Kamijou was surprised to find people surrounding Misawa Cram School. Kamijou stopped and did a double take. Somewhat far away, he saw a few people, whose genders were indiscernible, donned in skin-tight silver armor. The lack of people made it seem all the more suspicious. From Kamijou's angle he saw three individuals. If they were surrounding the four buildings, there must have been more of their

comrades.

…*What? Who are these weird guys…?* People from the Church? Mindful of these people, Kamijou decided to approach one of them. Perhaps the situation had changed while Kamijou had lost his memory like an idiot.

“Oi. What are you people doing? Are you members of the Church?” Kamijou remembered the knight who had died near the elevator. The people wore armor similar to that of the fallen knight.

One of them responded, shocked to hear the term “Church.” “I’m a member of the 13 Knights of the Roman Catholic Church, ‘Lancelot’ Vittorio Cassera.” He said rather impatiently. “Oh, so you’re a survivor of that battlefield? We saw you walk from over here. You’re really lucky. If you don’t want to die, get back.”

Kamijou wondered what nonsense he was spouting as he examined the entire suit of armor.

“We don’t wish to cause unnecessary damage. We’ll have the Gregorian Sacred Song Corp use the Gregorian Chant to carry out a Holy Incantation Bombardment. This is a means we decided after much deliberation in order to keep collateral damage to a minimum.”

The knight’s words were surprising. The Gregorian Chant was the spell that the Misawa Cram School students had used. According to Stiyl, the spell was of Roman Catholic origin. It was intended to be the ultimate weapon of the Roman Catholic Church. By utilizing 3333 monks gathered outside of a cathedral and having them chant the long spell, it intensified the power of the spell like sunlight into a magnifying glass.

Stiyl’s words once again floated in his mind. The replica already had such power, how much did the real one have?

“Bombard?! ARE YOU KIDDING ME!? HOW POWERFUL IS THIS THING!? HOW MANY PEOPLE INSIDE WILL GET INVOLVED!? ARE YOU GOING TO BLOW UP THE ENTIRE BUILDING!?”

“Certainly. This holy spell gathers 3333 at the greatest holy location in the world. The Vatican Church can accurately turn anything in this world to dust. Not to mention, if we leave that heretic’s tower intact, it’d be an insult to our

pride.”

“WHAT NONSENSE ARE YOU SAYING!? THERE ARE STILL COUNTLESS INNOCENT STUDENTS INSIDE! AND STIYL AND HIMEGAMI ARE STILL INSIDE! EVEN AUREOLUS—!”

Aureolus, the man that wanted to simply wanted to summon a vampire to save someone’s life.

“EXACTLY HOW BIG WILL THE BLAST RADIUS BE WHEN THAT HUGE BUILDING BLOWS UP?!? RUBBLE WILL FLY LIKE CANNONBALLS FOR 600 METERS!!”

“The end justifies the means! The bloodshed of today will be the foundation of tomorrow!”

Kamijou could not remain calm as his anger boiled at those words. His last comment had contradicted what he had said before. For the sake of relieving unnecessary suffering, Kamijou was told to run away. Yet somehow, the knight nonsensically felt no remorse for the lives of the people within Misawa Cram.

"ARE YOU KIDDING ME!? YOUR COMRADE’S IN THERE TOO!” said Kamijou, invoking the knight that died beside the elevator.

“Percival has been martyred in enemy territory. His life will be avenged for the better tomorrow.”

The dying, armored knight was unintelligible and filled with fury, seemingly having lost his ability to think calmly.

“Damn it! Wait a minute! One hour, no, 30 minutes will be enough!”

“We have no reason to listen your opinion! Begin the attack now!” The armored man calling himself Lancelot raised his large sword into the sky. Giving off a red glow, Kamijou thought it looked like an antenna.

Before Kamijou could stop him, the antenna was swung down.

“Revelation 8:7,” So began the coordinated ritual. “The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down

onto the earth!"

Perhaps due to the result of magic, a horn was heard from the glowing sword, a howling, echoing noise was heard through the night.

All voices vanished.

The clouds floating in the night sky promptly scattered and from far away were lightning. An enormous pillar of light descended from the heavens. However, the pillar was red. Like thousands of flaming arrows moving in close proximity, the pillar was spear striking one of the four Misawa Cram buildings.

The red lotus pierced roof to basement, crushing the tower to half of its original height like a squashed aluminum can. The glass shattered and interior decorations flew about in chaos.

However, there was more. The tower that was hit directly dragged the two neighboring towers by the overhead corridors, leaving the last unaffected tower like a tombstone.

The act of madness left Kamijou in bewilderment.

The buildings were twisted, cracks formed along the walls and people fell through the gaps like dust being patted from pants. Numerous pieces of falling debris utterly devastated the surroundings like a meteor shower. The only possible upside was the lack of people that the Opila rune had caused.

Kamijou gritted his teeth at the thought that many students and teachers, Stiyl, Himegami, Aureolus and perhaps even Index were still inside.

“YOU BASTARDS!!”

Kamijou exploded like a cannon, but not at the armored person. There was no time to bother with him; Kamijou’s destination was the site of bombardment. A storm of dust prevented Kamijou from making any progress. He could not open his eyes let alone see. Even so, he continued forward. In the back of his mind, he hoped it was all a joke. Then, something changed.

“?” Initially, Kamijou was under the impression that the dust began to scatter. The immense dust flew forward as if carried by a strong wind… to the wreckage

called Misawa Cram School. “!?”

Dust was just part of it. The previously falling rubble began to float in midair and the crumbling walls flipped erect. The debris moved together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and completely reformed the smooth towers that looked freshly renovated.

It was like watching a show in rewind. The collapsed towers were upright and the falling people were reabsorbed through the cracks. Most of the damage was repaired and soon, all four Misawa Cram towers were reformed as if nothing had happened. Even the neighboring buildings crushed by rubble reverted to what they were prior. One would have wonder if Kamijou’s memories were being manipulated.

Wait. Reverting things back to normal… Don’t tell me…! Kamijou looked up at the sky. The red lotus Divine spear that was fired from the sky had reappeared. Any onlooker could have realized where the spear was aimed: eye for an eye.

“Ah… ahh…” Kamijou turned to look at the moaning armored man. His knees had given way and he collapsed onto the ground. It seemed he truly knew how powerful the real Gregorian Chant was.

What’s going on? Kamijou returned his gaze to the night sky. Even the seven Level 5s of Academy City could not possibly create such a miracle.

Is that the enemy’s… That’s that guy’s real power…!!

Aureolus Izzard. In face of such a terrifying enemy, how would Kamijou fight him? Kamijou stood idly by with a numbed mind.

“DAMN IT!” Kamijou abandoned his fears and dashed off to Misawa Cram School.

Once he had arrived in front of the automatic doors, he hesitated to go in. With fear and trepidation, Kamijou entered the doors and returned to the battlefield.

The cram school’s interior was unchanged and, because of it, Kamijou felt goose bumps. Not to mention, the students were unharmed as they continued to listen to the teachers’ lectures. The students were fine despite the Gregorian Chant and the transmuting Limen Magna.

Passing through a certain classroom on a corridor, Kamijou saw something surprising and stopped.

That girl…!

Sitting a seat in the very back of the wide classroom was a girl that Kamijou recognized. She had braided hair and glasses… she was the girl who was turn to gold by Aureolus' Limen Magna when she protected Himegami.

She was there. It was like nothing had happened. She lived in that ordinary world.

"…!" The peaceful scene struck fear in Kamijou. Under the guidance of the alchemist's magic, life and death, fortune and misfortune, normal and abnormal were all reshuffled.

Kamijou did not know where to go. Arriving at a straight corridor, he finally found a familiar face.

"What? Why are you so panicky?" There stood the person who had betrayed him, used him as bait and could still shamelessly smile. There stood Stiyl Magnus, a person Kamijou truly loathed but was perplexedly relieved to see.

"Hm. If you're still here, I guess we're still in Japan, right? No wonder I've been seeing so many Asians this whole time. Speaking of which, what is this mysterious boundary? Kekkai? I seem to be somewhat familiar with it." Stiyl ignored Kamijou as he continued to mutter. Apparently, his memories were wiped like Kamijou's. It seemed he had even forgotten the objective they had for Misawa Cram School, implying his memories were erased even more extensively that Kamijou's.

He could return Stiyl's memories if he touched Stiyl's head with his right hand, but Kamijou was worried whether doing so would erase Stiyl's revival post-bombardment. His right hand was ineffective against Aureolus' order that he "shall not touch," but, if it involved Stiyl's life, the effect may have been undesirable.

"Oi! What block were you in?"

"What?"

“Just tell me!”

“Should be North Block. Why?”

Kamijou heaved a sigh of relief. Only the North block was untouched after the Gregorian bombardment, meaning Stiyl had no need to be revived.

Once confirmed, Kamijou knew what to do. “Oi! Stiyl! Let me teach you a charm that erases your doubts.”

“…Oriental Charms are Kanzaki’s specialty.”

“Just do as I say. It’s simple. Close your eyes and stick your tongue out!”

With a look of suspicion, he followed Kamijou’s instructions.

"HERE'S A SOUVENIR FOR ACTUALLY USING ME AS BAIT AND ESCAPING BY YOURSELF, YOU BASTARD!" declared Kamijou.

"...Eh?"

Kamijou slammed an uppercut against Stiyl’s chin using his right hand.

Memories returned and a tongue was bitten, proceeded by rolling on the floor.

Part 4

Aureolus Izzard stood on the highest floor of the Northern-most block. It was a floor called Principal’s office, a large space that encompassed the entire level. As a cram school, it was more like a director’s room than a principal’s office.

Aureolus was looking out the window, ignoring the glamorous room and luxurious decorations inside. Though, the night scenery below was not his interest. Instead, he was looking at the face reflected on the window.

…The road taken was quite long.

With one sentence—just a single sentence—like **“Revert back to normal”** the entire building stood back up like a living creature. He had witnessed the event without even batting an eyebrow. He looked at the mirrored face and sunk into deep thought.

In the past, he was not like that. Though he was more of the stoic type, he was still a human that expressed his emotions. In the current time, he had an emotionless calm that he ignored since he had no time to be bothered with it.

It’s acceptable even if I’ve become like this. Even if he were aware of the change since the very beginning, he had no time to relax. He had an entire world to fight for the sake of achieving his goals.

Aureolus Izzard had done everything to save the single girl on the black ebony table behind him. Index Librorum Prohibitorum. Index. Three years had passed since he had met the girl who did not know her own given name. While involved with the Roman Catholic Church, he was a Cancellarius. Though a member of the Church, he was tasked with writing grimoires, making his situation a unique one amongst unique. He was to decode modern witchcraft, discover ways to counter them, and record the results. He had believed, through his actions, he could protect innocents hurt by witches.

In fact, the grimoires that Aureolus had written had helped many people. However, the Roman Catholic Church had used those grimoires as trump cards. Pagan cults and even other Christian sects like the Anglicans and Orthodoxies had no knowledge of the existence of these trump cards. Such individuals were even warned that they should convert to Catholicism if they wished to be protected from witches. Though the alchemist had devised ways to defend against the witches, many were not benefited, some even harmed. It was much too unreasonable, as if they were patients who could have been operated upon but were abandoned.

Aureolus could not endure. He had originally believed that his trump card was created to save others. Eventually, he had decided to smuggle the “books” he had written. He escaped to England, a country of magic seriously rampant with witches. Aureolus carefully disguised himself and successfully made contact with the Anglican Church using underground methods.

It was there that he met the girl that could not be saved. At first glance, he knew.

He whom he had given the task of saving the entire world knew that he could save the girl before him. The girl possessed 103,000 grimoires from across the globe, each capable of driving an ordinary person insane. However, the keeper herself smiled on, despite knowing being saved was impossible.

Saving her was impossible. A human being memorizing 103,000 grimoires would result in her physical intoxication because of the grimoires' logics and the mind being corroded by the actual knowledge. It was the realization that caused the alchemist to see the limits of his knowledge. The girl perpetually facing misfortune always smiled for others. If he could not accomplish saving even her, how could even discuss saving the entire world?

At some point when he had lost count of how many grimoires he had written, he began to wonder why he had not given up and continued to write. It was then he had realized. Even if saving her were impossible, he struggled, using the excuse of providing her with grimoires to visit her.

It was an ordinary story. An alchemist desired to save a girl but in the end was saved by the girl. His realization that he could not save her brought about the end: he could no longer hold a pen, his faith and confidence in his writing ability gone.

Unable to save… unable to save… The alchemist at that time could save no one. However, to save her at no matter the cost, he chose to walk, even fall down, a path of darkness for that one reason.

If Aureolus could obtain the power to save everything, he decided he would utilize it for the girl before him. Thus, Aureolus rebelled against the Roman Catholic Church, Christianity and even the entire world. Despite those actions he had failed. Depleting the knowledge taken from the Hermes and Zurich schools he still failed. He had believed he could simply understand the human anatomy and cure any disease. He had believed that understanding the brain could cure any emotional scar. But of course, he was wrong.

If it were impossible through faith or technology, what was wrong with relying on Cain's descendants, whose powers surpassed human understanding? For achieving his goal, he was willing to betray and manipulate anyone and anything. This included Deep Blood. And, like that, the alchemist strayed from righteousness. His initial desire to save others had become a pitiful shadow.

“…”

Aureolus Izzard had not realized. The girl titled Deep Blood watched him silently from behind with the desire to save others.

Aureolus had not realized. The savior had not arrived.

“Aureolus Izzard reflected the Gregorian Chant? How is that possible?” said the shocked Stiyl as Kamijou told them during their game of tag. Incidentally, Stiyl was playing with a flaming sword.

“It’s true! It was like I was watching the rewind of a video! The damaged towers reverted back to how they were!” said Kamijou, running down the corridor. Stiyl had apparently explored further into the building than Kamijou had but, before he could discover the alchemist’s hiding place, he had wavered.

“If that’s the case… don’t tell me… but modern alchemy can’t possibly do that much…” muttered Stiyl as he exhaled smoke.

“He even used chants like ‘you shall not touch me’ and ‘forget everything.’ Is magic really so omnipotent that anything you want appears!?”

“…How is this possible? Magic’s a form of knowledge with strict rules and logic. If there were such a ridiculous spell, who would want to honestly research magic?”

“Then what did I see? Everything he said somehow happened.”

“’Everything he said…’ is such an irritating term. Reminds me of Ars Magna.”

Focused on the noted term, Kamijou remembered the discussion where Stiyl mentioned the final, unachieved aim of alchemy, where one could project one’s thoughts onto the world. “Then, wait. Has that guy already mastered the most powerful spell in alchemy?”

“THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!” yelled Stiyl with a rare, violent tone. “I said it before. Ars Magna isn’t something achievable by humans. The incantation exists, sure, but it can’t be completed with one, no, two hundred years of continuous

incantation. You can't shorten the incantation and the later generations can't pick it up. Like a game of telephone it gets more and more twisted. Humans with limited lifespan just can't possibly have that kind of magic!" Stiyl's refutation was logical for those who understood magic, but, Stiyl himself trembled as if he had seen something unbelievable.

"You're right." Kamijou pondered from a different point of view. "If could really do anything he wanted, we wouldn't be alive. He wouldn't've used the False Sacred Song Corps to use the Gregorian Chant or that fake Aureolus. Wouldn't he have just said 'die'?"

In fact, vampires and Deep Blood would have been unnecessary. If it were necessary, he could have just created a vampire. If the alchemist's desires were projectable onto reality, why was there a need for vampires?

"Speaking of which, what's his aim? I'd heard he wanted to save someone but he ended up mercilessly killing a lot of people. Right now, even Index is involved… Did the stress of blowing this out of proportion get to him?"

"What? That child too?"

"I heard him talk about her but I never actually saw her. Maybe he was delusional or something." Kamijou said with an easygoing demeanor, "Maybe consolation for himself?"

Stiyl's expression had become more serious. Apparently bitter, he spat his cigarette away. "Tch! I see what's going on. He isolated himself for three years to study alchemy and hasn't kept track of current events." Said Stiyl has he stuffed a new cigarette. "I know what he wants. It's Index."

"What?" Confused, to his understanding, the situation had no relevance to Index.

"Listen, Kamijou Touma. Index has had her memories erased every year. Every year, her relationship changed and found a new partner each time."

"So… What about it?"

"This year, it's you. Two years ago it was me and," Stiyl continued vengefully. "three years ago it was Aureolus Izzard. They were teacher and student."

Shock.

“The fate for every companion was the same. They tried to save her from having her memory wiped but absolutely failed.” He said with disdain. “It was of course the same for him. And, it would seem he didn’t accept it.”

“What do you mean?”

“Simple. We companions weren’t abandoned by her, she simply forgot us. If that so, then all they needed to do was cure Index and salvage her memory. Wouldn’t she go back to them?”

Kamijou’s heart felt a pain like a hammering stake. He did not know what affected him so much. It was a good thing that Index was healed but still there was an inexplicable and invisible impact. He remembered the smile. That smile that she showed to others carried a heavy burden for Kamijou.

“But it won’t happen.” Stiyl smiled. “Just like how erasing someone’s memories is already a huge sin, changing memories is as well. He must know this or he’s completely lost his senses.” Stiyl voice was much too soft. As Kamijou turned around to face Stiyl and hear more clearly, Stiyl simply exhaled smoke and calmly shook his head.

“It’s nothing. I’m saying that guy can’t save that child. It’s that simple.”

“Why?” Kamijou failed to make the connection, his mind focused on the idea of his omnipotence. If he could take away people’s memories or revive the dead, what could he possibly not do?

“The reason’s simple. It’s you.”

?

“Haven’t you saved her already? How could someone be saved twice? It’s that simple, nothing more to it.”

The boy drew the connections. Aureolus Izzard was Index’s former partner three years prior. Since he had lost Index, he had lost contact and did not know the current situation.

Which meant that Aureolus…

“We’re here. Look, he even deliberately left the door open for us. How nice.” Stiyl looked forward. In the highest floor of Misawa Cram School’s North tower, the enormous doors leading into the principal’s office were open. They were inviting Kamijou and Stiyl.

Part 5

The space was quite wide.

The room was once owned by the former-principal, incidentally also the founder of the cult, of Misawa Cram School. Though the room was luxurious, it lacked class and represented the cult’s twisted desires. It was like the annoying experience of entering a restaurant adorned properly but showed no care for the clients.

Himegami was shocked to see Kamijou enter the room but Aureolus, by contrast, had no reaction as if expecting his entrance. The emptiness a severe one that was reminiscent of old, faded, yellowish photographs.

This was not planned by the alchemist. Perhaps to him, there was nothing in the world he could not do, and, because of it, little seemed real. Like an esper capable of altering the minds of others, when he saw others smile, he felt no happiness. When he saw the perfect smile, it was as significant to him as the flick of a finger.

The logic was similar. For someone capable of creating anything, his actual creations held little value. Even the environment lacked the atmosphere of a battlefield. Anywhere Aureolus Izzard appeared became a futile battlefield.

“Obviously, I can see that you’ve deduced my goal.” He began calmly. “If that’s the case, why do you intend to stop me? Wasn’t your rune magic meant to save Index?” The alchemist glanced before him. On the luxurious table lied the sleeping silver-haired girl.

Kamijou tried to dash forward but was stopped by Stiyl's long arm.

"Simply put, this method can't save that child. I don't want to watch an operation doomed to fail. This child isn't that worthless."

"This isn't true. It's just your envy, but I understand. Because we were comrades who had the same dream be crushed, you are unhappy that I've surpassed you. However, I don't consider it enjoyable and I never will." Stiyl frowned at the way Aureolus said it so naturally without even a hint of sarcasm.

"In the past, Index's brain was overloaded with so much information that her memories were erased each and every year. It was a fate the human body could not defy." He said sternly. "However, by using a power above humanity, I can solve the problem. When I had reached this conclusion, I found it unbelievable that no one had suggested we borrow the power of vampires."

"..."

"Vampires are immortal and store infinite amounts of memories in their brains that are similar to humans'. I'd never heard of a vampire's brain being overloaded by information." said the alchemist. "Essentially, vampires possess this attribute: no matter how long they live their existences are maintained."

"Hmph. I see. So you intend to interact with vampires and ask them to teach their method?" Stiyl shook his cigarette with his mouth. "For the sake of safety, let me ask. If this method can't be used on people, what do you intend to do?"

"Basically, if a human's body cannot do it, I'll place the Forbidden Library in something not human." Aureolus said without hesitation.

The alchemist's plan meant that he would…

"Turn her into a vampire? Tch! What Christian in this world would be happy to become a descendant of Cain? This's a common mistake people have. When you want to save someone, the most important thing is to consider their thoughts and perspective, right? It's something I only learned recently."

"…Absolutely ridiculous. That kind of mindset is just feigned kindness. This child once told me at that final moment that she did not want to forget me. Even if she defied the teachings, even if she willingly sacrificed her life, she wanted to

keep her memories. She told me these things while she couldn't even move. She didn't even realize she was crying—while smiling!" Aureolus gritted his teeth. Kamijou did not know what he was thinking or remembering.

"It would seem you don't intend to change your mind no matter what. If that's the case, though a bit cruel, I'll have to use my trump card." Stiyl suddenly turned to Kamijou. "Oi! Current partner! Tell him! Tell this train wreck what fatal flaw his plan has."

"…What?" Aureolus finally turned to look at Kamijou. Kamijou had a difficulty figuring out which part of Stiyl's comments angered the alchemist.

"Just what time period are you from?"

With a perplexed expression, the alchemist stared at Kamijou.

"And that's what is. Index has already been saved. Not by you, not by but by the current partner. This guy did what you couldn't achieve." Stiyl smirked with cruelty. "This happened only a week ago. Ah it's predictable that you wouldn't know. You were away from that child for three years so of course you wouldn't know she'd been saved."

"That's impossible…"

"Yeah. I can understand you don't believe it. I even witnessed it myself but couldn't believe it. No, I didn't want to believe it myself. This is a declaration for me: that child will never come back to me again."

"PREPOSTEROUS! THIS IS IMPOSSIBLE! HOW COULD THERE BE ANY OTHER WAY TO SAVE INDEX?! A PERSON THAT POSSESSES A HUMAN BODY! THIS GUY ISN'T EVEN A MAGICIAN OR ALCHEMIST. JUST WHAT COULD HE POSSIBLY DO?"

"About that, since it involves Necessarius… no, since it concerns the pride of the Anglican Church, I'd rather not tell the story. I can only tell you this," Stiyl exhaled the smoke with cruelty. "That guy's right hand has an ability called Imagine Breaker. Basically, it's a terrifying ability that shouldn't belong to an ordinary person."

Shocked and unable to calm down, the alchemist stared at Kamijou. "…Hold on

a minute. This means…”

“That’s right. It’s been tough for you. I’d heard you’d betrayed the Catholic Church and hid underground for three years? It looks like it was a waste of time. Hm. I can understand the pain of getting nothing back in return. However, this child is currently living a happy life with her partner as you’d wished.”

“Ha…”

It was the decisive sentence. The foundations supporting Aureolus Izzard crumbled.

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!”

He began his maniacal laughter.

“HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA
HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!”

…*This guy’s insane.* Kamijou thought numbly but surely. Unexpectedly, the eyes began to follow something. In front of them all, on the large table, the girl moved. The sleep Index began to regain some consciousness after Aureolus’ mad laughter. She was perhaps the last barrier for Aureolus’ mental sanity.

She widened her eyes slightly and softly spoke like a person holding thread in their hand. “…Touma?”

The person she saw was not the Aureolus Izzard before her. She cared not who, when, where or how she was brought there. She cared not for her current state or what happened during her unconsciousness.

She smiled. She smiled happily. In her line of sight was Kamijou Touma.

“Ah.” Kamijou automatically backed off. He was glad to see her with such an attitude. Kamijou felt it irreplaceable as she acted like a kitten opening its eyes, only caring about Kamijou’s expression.

This scene brought about a sharp coldness. Behind Index, the alchemist who was supposed to be the main character was forgotten by the girl he had sought to

protect. His face stiffened as if he had witnessed the end of the world.

Kamijou could not face the reality. Aureolus Izzard was once the male protagonist. He had betrayed the Catholic Church, renounced his beliefs and became an alchemist, all to save the girl in front of him. He faced the worst outcome. Even Kamijou Touma, if he had taken one wrong step, would have faced a similar fate.

The pure, holy girl before them was beloved by people all over the world. Because she was a holy girl, she could only love a male protagonist. That simple purity, bordering on cruelty, caused the most pain.

I should be perfect!! Why are you unmoved!?! What do I lack!?

Kamijou remember the defeated clone. It was not a shallowly crafted replica. The dummy itself truly portrayed the character Aureolus Izzard.

“Ugh!” Aureolus Izzard was speechless. He smiled a frozen, twisted smile as if he’d barfed air. Right above Index, Aureolus raised his hand. It seemed like the blade of a guillotine but Index’s gaze had not left Kamijou, causing the alchemist even more rage as he placed more force in his arm.

“Index!”

Kamijou considered running to her but because of his anxiousness could not decide with which foot to step first. The alchemist laughed maniacally and Kamijou, the current protagonist, raised his right hand.

It was too late. He had not made it in time.

The alchemist’s arm was… never swung down.

Kamijou stopped.

“Ugh…” Above Index’s head, the arm, which was raising what seemed to be a guillotine, trembled. “Ugh… UGGHHH!” He was immobile. He had lost everything. He had become an alchemist and even betrayed his old allies to save a single girl. But, the girl was already saved by a stranger whom he did not know and Index ignored the man who had sacrificed everything for her.

If Kamijou were in that position, could he have still relied on Index? Could he convince himself that it was not betrayal? Aureolus Izzard could not bring himself to hurt her. For the alchemist, she was that important.

…

Kamijou did not move. He had no memories and, despite the fact that others told him that he had saved her, did not remember how he did or what he was thinking when he had. Like that, Kamijou Touma gained the trust of others by saving someone from whence he had no memories. In face of the alchemist, Kamijou wondered whether he had a right to keep her with him.

Aureolus turned and glared sharply at Kamijou. The alchemist had the power to sentence anyone to death with a single sentence. Kamijou knew it was a glare of death but, deep deep inside, understood his feelings. It was impossible for Aureolus to calm down. He could not bring himself to kill Index and, having lost all direct, went on a rampage.

Who would become the scapegoat?

Logically, the outcome was predictable.

“**SLAM TO THE GROUND, INTRUDERS!!**”

Like an explosion, an angry roar was heard.

Immediately, Kamijou felt the weight of uncountable hands push him to the ground as if he were a bank robber being crushed to the floor after having his gun taken away. As the term “intruder” included Stiyl, Kamijou saw the red-haired magician be flattened to the floor from the corner of his eye.

“Uuh… Ugh…”

The sensation of having his intestines flipped around almost caused Kamijou to puke. He began to move his right hand, which felt like it was being attracted by a strong magnetic field, forcefully to his chest, inch by inch. If he could contact his body perhaps it would have released him like when he recovered his memories.

“HA! HAHA! HAHAHAHA! I WON’T KILL YOU SO EASILY! LET ME

ENJOY THIS A LITTLE LONGER! I WON’T DO ANYTHING TO INDEX, BUT I WON’T BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN MY SANITY IF I DON’T TAKE IT OUT YOU TWO!”

He pulled out a needle as thin as hair and aimed with trembling at his body. Then, he stabbed it like pressing button in his body. He then tossed aside the needle like a poisonous bug nibbling at his flesh. The actions were signals and declarations of the commencing attack.

Aureolus again glared at Kamijou.

“Stop it!”

Himegami Aisa moved between them with the same posture she had when she shielded Kamijou prior. However, this time there was a decisive difference: Aureolus valued not Himegami Aisa but Deep Blood. Since his aim was to save Index, if it were impossible, there would have been no reason to keep a useless method!

"Hime--" Kamijou began but could say nothing to save her.

The image of her back radiated her worry and, not just for Kamijou, but Aureolus and his crumbling sanity. Not explicitly said, but Kamijou could tell that she wanted to calm Aureolus down before he went down the road of destruction.

Who could have simply said the cruel reality?

“Out of the way, woman!”

It was the greatest failure. Kamijou saw the serious eyes that raged like gun barrels. Kamijou moved, or rather tried to move, his hand. If he did not move in, Himegami would surely die. Slowly, bit by bit, inch by inch, he dragged the right hand bound to the floor. He used his very teeth to touch his ace, his right hand, like he was going to eat his index finger.

BANG! With the sound of bones breaking, his body regained freedom. This is my chance! Kamijou frantically stood up to move Himegami aside and silence Aureolus.

“**Die.**” As Aureolus Izzard speak, time seemed to stop.

Assassinated, strangled, poisoned, shot, beheaded, slaughtered, hacked, beaten up, burned, nipped, crushed, ganged up, frozen, drowned. No one knew with what method Himegami was to die.

With no wounds, no bleeding and no illness, she simply died.

Like a consumed battery, she was expended. If souls existed, hers was extracted from her flesh, leaving behind an empty shell.

Himegami did not even cry out. Looking like she would cry, she held back her tears. Her preparation had prevented any surprise or shock. She wore an expression of regret from her inability to prevent the predetermined. Himegami Aisa knew the result of blocking Aureolus. Even so, with a speck of hope, she still attempted it.

The girl no one needed was viewed as a simple object until the very end. Like how the alchemist had never understood how to be a protagonist, Himegami Aisa had failed to become a heroine till the bitter end. Like an unappreciated background, she was dead and worthless. Such was the fate of Deep Blood Himegami Aisa.

In face of such a scene, who could have remained silent?

“Whose life…” Kamijou’s eyes ignored the alchemist’s existence and ran toward Himegami Aisa who was falling onto the floor. There was no reason. He simply felt that if he allowed her to reach the ground, her death would have become permanent. “ARE YOU MESSING WITH, YOU BASTARD!”

The instant before she reached the ground, Kamijou managed to catch her with both arms. She was quite light, so light it seemed like something important was stolen from her. She felt unbelievably soft in his arms. But, with his right carrying her, he felt a weak but definite heart beat.

“What? My Ars Magna imbued with Gold has been dispelled by your right hand?” The alchemist’s expression froze.

“IMPOSSIBLE! HIMEGAMI AISA’S DEATH WAS ALREADY DECIDED! DOES YOUR RIGHT HAND POSSESS SOME SORT OF HOLY VATICAN

SECRET ART!?”

"..." Kamijou did not reply. It was enough and his questions were unimportant. Like when he touched his head and regained his day’s memories, why he could negate the order to die was unimportant.

It was important that Kamijou would definitely not forgive the alchemist. He would pity him and understand him. Even if Aureolus could not bring himself to kill her after she hurt him, the man’s actions were absolutely unforgivable.

The situation had changed. Sure, Kamijou had witnessed as the alchemist’s most important person betrayed him, as his most important person was taken away and as his anger exploded and had refused to scold himself. Before someone that he truly cared for, how could he simply vent his anger for self-satisfaction? Kamijou wholeheartedly disagreed.

The current him did not understand the old Kamijou Touma: what memories he had, the past he lived, his plans for the future, what he liked, what he hated, what he protected in the past and what he wanted to protect in future were all lost. But, surely, there one thing he knew. Kamijou Touma would never have approved of the alchemist’s, no man’s, actions.

The two Kamijou Toumas who were walking their own paths had finally reached a common understanding, an intersection.

“Alright, Aureolus Izzard. If you think you can do anything you want…” Kamijou Touma gently placed Himegami Aisa onto the floor and stood up. He made no sound but anger seethed around him like static electricity. Without any restraint, he declared. “THEN I'LL DESTROY THAT FUCKED UP ILLUSION OF YOURS!!”

The words belonged to no one else. It was the voice of the Imagine Breaker, Kamijou Touma.

Between the Lines 2

That's why I wanted to be a spellcaster.

It was a story of ten years past. On a certain night, a mountain village in Kyoto was attacked by a vampire. It had happened so suddenly, without warning, without a trace.

A once ordinary village that had no need for a police station had become living hell overnight. The defending young people were killed one by one until it was difficult to tell who was or was not a vampire. The former companions eventually were consumed in the chaos of murdering each other. Before the sun rose, there were two types of life: the dead and the vampires.

How? Why did I survive for so long? The girl thought in her young heart. Vampires were everywhere, the familiar aunts and uncles who had once said goodbye to her at night. The farmer uncle who had once told her that “it’s late, hurry up and go home,” bit into her neck.

The moment it happened, he turned to dust.

Yuzu, who had once told her “we’ll play together tomorrow,” bit into her neck.

The moment it happened, she turned to dust.

Her mother, who had once told her to “run away”, bit into her neck.

The moment it happened, she turned to dust.

Thus, the vampires realized. Like vampires’ bane, if they bit her neck, they died. Irrelevant of her desires, the girl’s blood was acid. If their mouths made contact with her blood, they melted and perished. Even so, they continued to do it while the girl gently stared as the once familiar vampires became dust scattering in the wind.

What could she have said?

“I’m sorry.” said every vampire.

Some had said they had not wanted to become vampires while others said they had not wanted others to become like them. They believed that by reducing to ashes, they could have been redeemed.

Eventually, the village was caked by ash. It was peaceful. With a lack of people, it was peaceful. Even the first vampire, the instigator of the tragedy, was unaccounted for. It was unknown whether the vampire had bitten her and joined the ashes.

She realized.

The instigator was a victim as well. The girl, whose ability killed them in one stroke, likely instilled fear in that vampire. Trembling each and every day with nowhere to go, he had chosen to kill a girl without the necessary power. Having exhausted all options, the vampire had considered converting the entire village to

bolster the strike.

However, an entire village of vampires was decimated by that one girl.

So, I wanted to be a spellcaster.

I want to save those that can't be saved. I want to save the abandoned. Whether victims or sinners, dead or not, I want to pull them out of Hell. The only magicians who can defy logic exist in picture books.

No matter what, she had to become a spellcaster. She dreamed of the day she became one. Her mind was set on becoming one. Therefore, the day that she met the alchemist, was the day that the impossible dream found a possibility. That night, with comfortable excitement, she could not sleep.

However, in present time, the alchemist stood before her.

"Out of the way, woman!"

Her sought after dream was horribly shattered by the twisted mouth.

"**Die.**"

At the moment of death, she knew not what she was even thinking, unable to maintain her own consciousness. Under that hazy circumstance of disorientation, her mind was dragged into a dark abyss.

But it was then that she heard a boy's roar that came from neither the magician nor alchemist. It was the voice of that ordinary boy. "ARE YOU MESSING WITH, YOU BASTARD!!"

The boy was angered. Angered not because of what the alchemist did but because of the girl's death.

To the girl, he looked stunning. And, for some reason, she thought that the unattainable dream was standing right there.

Chapter 4: The Deadly Seven. *Deadly_Sins.*

Part 1

The two faced each other in the faded and expansive area.

“…”

Kamijou ignored the weakly breathing Himegami Aisa because of a lack of time. She had expended all of her energy and had even risked her life to stop him. Thus, if he truly wanted to be considerate, it was imperative that he quickly stop the alchemist in front of him.

The distance was ten meters. Facing a man who could turn words into reality, it was a distance long enough to cause despair.

"…"

Kamijou still stepped forward. There was no reason to stop walking and no reason to turn back. Rather fighting be his only option, it was what Kamijou wanted to do.

"…"

There was no need for words or signals. The battle between the esper and alchemist began. The goal was simple: defeat him.

"Phew!"

Kamijou exhaled slightly and explosively charged at Aureolus. The alchemist simply took out one of his needles and stabbed his neck.

A distance of only ten meters was closable in four steps. Four steps was all Kamijou needed.

“**Suffocate.**”

The moment he took his first step, he lost all momentum. His neck felt like it was tied by steel wires and automatically bent down. Feeling like he was just poisoned, Kamijou used his right hand to grab the throat. This was the same method he had used to retake his stolen memories and return Himegami her life after being ordered to die.

But this time, Kamijou did not regain his breathing. It felt like something deep in his throat was obstructing his breathing.

Calm down! Calm down! Kamijou released his right hand from his neck and heard his throat release a strange noise. *What did he order? Use a rope to tie the neck? No, wait! It was more ambiguous… he told me to suffocate!*

Kamijou proceeded to stuff one of his fingers into his mouth as if trying to forcibly vomit something he had eaten. As the finger reached deep into his throat, with the urge to vomit came a PAH! He heard the sound of shattering glass and could breathe once more.

The entire event lasted a mere five seconds. But, against Aureolus, who could turn any sentence into a weapon, they were five seconds of toying. Aureolus once again stabbed his neck and nonchalantly extricated it.

“**Be electrocuted.**”

The moment he finished speaking, blue-white sparks surrounded Kamijou from all directions. Before Kamijou’s body could even freeze, the electric vortex burned the air and rushed for Kamijou.

“...!”

Kamijou raised his hand. It was a response he had not planned but the lone right hand still took the role of a lightning rod, absorbing the electricity. The sparks that interacted with the hand trembled like a snake that devoured poison, and then silently vanished.

I can dispel it…

For Kamijou, excitement surpassed tension as his heart began to race. His opponent, however, narrowed his eyes and stabbed his neck once more.

“**Be strangled** and **be crushed.**”

For a moment, the floor rippled like the surface of water and numerous ropes flew about, painfully choking Kamijou’s neck. At the same time, a rusted car fell down from the twisting ceiling.

I can dispel it!

Kamijou simply waved his right hand and the tied ropes broke like soaked paper bags while the rusted car morphed into a coarse, sugar-like powder, disappearing into the air. Aureolus removed the needle like he was scratching off a poisonous bug.

I can dispel it! That should be enough! My right hand dispels this guy’s attacks! If he attacks verbally, it means there’ll be an attack. It’s nothing if I deal with it calmly!

As Aureolus was the type to state his commands, it meant his attacks were predictable. It was like a card game that tested human responses. Like if one heard the word “electrocuted,” he could guess what attack it would become. It took less than a second to predict the attack. In normal brawling, there was no second of reprieve. Boxers had 0.3 seconds before a punch landed and, though each attack was terrifyingly powerful, the speed of Aureolus’ commands was like that of ordinary punches.

With such things in mind, the fear of not knowing what attack will come was gone, like the worry of a delinquent bringing a knife to children’s fights. Aureolus noted Kamijou’s reason for confidence and frowned.

“I see. Truly, that right hand can dispel my Ars Magna Imbued Gold without exception.” The alchemist was still confident, causing the boy some puzzlement. “However, that would mean that the negation effect won’t occur as long as it doesn’t touch your right hand, hm?”

Kamijou’s body went numb.

“**Form a pistol in my hand. Load with magic bullets. Application is firing. One will suffice**.” The alchemist seemed rather excited as he stabbed his neck.

As Aureolus gently waved his hand, a sword appeared. At first impression, it was a Western sword that a fairy tale prince would use, but was slightly different. Where the hilt should have been was a pirate’s musket pistol. It was a sort of gun with a strange projectile.

The attack approaching, Kamijou tensed.

"**Begin to fire at a speed that surpasses human motion recognition.**”

Seemingly desiring to rip apart the air, he swung the Western sword horizontally, which came with the sound of exploding gunpowder. The next instant, Kamijou felt something barely brush past his face and, after that, blue-white bullets struck the wall behind him and exploded.

“…!”

It was actually none to extravagant: the musket’s trigger was pulled. However, how could the human eye see a magic bullet that ripped through the very air? Kamijou had raised his hand but did not react. The destructiveness of bullets was easier to understand, making him more nervous than esper powers or magic normally would.

The speed was completely different from that of the fake Aureolus’ Limen Magna. It was irrelevant to magic or esper powers. A magic bullet could not be endured by human flesh, becoming a sort of killing blow.

Aureolus revealed a satisfied expression and removed the needle.

“**Mass produce the previous process. Simulation firing with ten Hidden Rifle Imperceptible Rifles.**”

With those words, ten muskets appeared in his hands, five in each in a metallic fan-like array. If those guns were fired, Kamijou Touma would inevitably fail to avoid or dodge.

I’ve got to… run!

Kamijou had decided to run before the firing. Though he knew it was a pointless struggle, he actively tried to flee. Then, he realized that behind Kamijou, at his feet, Himegami was still barely breathing. Even further behind, Stiyl was immobile.

“IDIOT! WHY ARE YOU STOPPING!?” yelled Stiyl with shock.

“**Preparations complete. Ten hidden rifles: fire simultaneously.**”

With his command, ten blazing, blue-white bullets struck Kamijou. Kamijou’s body was covered with what felt like fists wearing brass knuckles. The word “fire” failed to describe the speed. The high-speed sniping was untraceable while even editing a recording of it.

"Ugh… argh…!"

Luckily, the magic bullets were not fatal. Hit all over by the old-style bullets, blood spilled everywhere. He was shot back, bounced off the floor like a rubber ball and finally stopped once he had crashed into something, specifically Stiyl’s body. In the end, the distance had widened by seven meters. Though he was in so much pain he thought his bones were broken, he could still move. Of course, this was not luck. The alchemist had already warned that he would not kill him so easily.

Apparently happy with the outcome, Aureolus raised a hand at Kamijou.

“…Tch. What kind of joke was that? It’s almost like you can actually distort reality with your words.” Before Aureolus could speak, Stiyl cut in, causing him to divert his attention that way.

“Hmph. Ars Magna is the pinnacle of alchemy. It might be hard to obtain, but, if I continue to pursue it, naturally it will become obtainable.”

“That’s not possible! Though Ars Magna’s theory is complete, the incantation is way too long. It can’t be completed with one or two hundred years! The incantation can’t be shortened and passing it on becomes a telephone game of error in the ritual!” said Stiyl while giving Kamijou a look.

Kamijou nodded with understanding. Since Aureolus’ method of attack was to turn his words into reality, they just needed to divert his attention and safely take

away his intention to attack.

Stiyl continued to distract Aureolus while giving Kamijou hints. *While I'm buying time for you, think of some ways to counter this!!*

"This is actually a trifle." Aureolus, ignorant of it all, continued. "Hmph. It's true I couldn't complete the ritual in one or two hundred years. But that's just one person chanting it, right? From father to son, son to grandson, such a method would result in error like a game of telephone… that's the logic, but there's no need to pass it down, right?"

"…What?" Stiyl frowned slightly

Then, Index dejectedly spoke. "It's the Gregorian Chant. By manipulating 2,000 people to make them chant simultaneously, the chant will complete at least 2000 times faster. A ritual that takes 400 years would be completed in less than 7 days."

Rather than passed down, it was chanted at once. Kamijou stared at her face. At first, he thought she had derived it from the 103,000 grimoires but he realized that, in a world where no one had managed to complete Ars Magna, there was no book to reference. She had deduced it from the current information.

"In fact, I thought there would be a multiplication effect in the spell that would cause it to drastically increase. But, I only managed to increase it by 120 fold, so it was overall unsuccessful."

Kamijou gathered his thoughts that were slipping away and examined his surroundings. He could still move his body and he was seven meters from Aureolus, not too far. If he could dodge his attack, he could attack him.

"120 fold… you finished it in only half a day?" Stiyl spoke with extreme seriousness. "But this is the home of espers. If these people used the Gregorian Chant with their bodies, they'd explode and die!"

Kamijou looked around but found nothing usable as a weapon. He rummaged through I pocked and felt something hard and cold but nothing suitable as a weapon.

Two shots. If Kamijou could dodge two of Aureolus' commands, he could close

the distance.

“Haven’t you noticed?” Aureolus titled his head. “Can’t I just repair spoiled goods like a collapsed building?”

For a moment, Kamijou stopped to stare at Aureolus.

“Ah, didn’t I tell you? Today wasn’t the first time those students died.” He said carelessly.

“YOU BASTARD!” Kamijou’s mind blurred from the anger.

“It’s true. I’m not stupid enough to ignore my own sins… Yes, I brought failure upon myself. Even so, I still believed there was someone I needed to save. In the end, I ended up with this unexpected outcome.” Aureolus removed a needle and tossed it aside like drawn poison.

“YOU BASTARD!”

Kamijou had stood before Aureolus had given the order.

Kamijou grabbed the object in his pocket as Aureolus prepared to give the next command to kill the standing Kamijou.

Before he could speak, the boy threw the phone at Aureolus.

“…?” For a moment, he was truly stunned, which Kamijou utilized to begin his run.

A cell phone could not defeat an Alchemist, but it was a distraction to buy time and close the distance. Predictably, it was distracting.

“**Abort the throw. Turn it into a pointlessly thrown pebble!**”

In that short time, Kamijou approached, fully capable of defending against Aureolus’ next command. There was chance to turn it around!

“**Bring a pistol into my hand. Used for shooting. Finish according to preparations!**”

On the other hand, if Kamijou failed to evade, it was over.

Aureolus fired ten musket-swords. SLASH! The empty weapons dropped onto the floor, sounding like a secret code as the weapons reappeared in the alchemist's hands.

Kamijou's face twitched tensely as Aureolus was about to say the crucial word.

"INNOCENTIUS!" Stiyl's roar interrupted.

Stunned, the boy turned to Stiyl. *That's impossible, right? Isn't that thing summoned with the runes all over the dorm? Besides, Innocentius was stationed in the student dorm to protect Index.*

It was apparently a hoax, a hoax meant to slightly extend Kamijou's lifespan.

Aureolus' burning, cannon-like eyes glared at Stiyl.

"**Float into the sky, Father from London.**" Aureolus said it quietly, as if preparing for an execution.

Once he had finished, Stiyl's body floated into the air like gravity was forgotten everywhere below the ceiling. Kamijou automatically stopped. Imagine Breaker was capable of negating the command but, a simpleton would have known they were much too far away.

"YOU IDIOT! IT'S EASY FOR YOU TO BEAT AUREOLUS! THAT GUY'S WEAKNESS IS THE NEEDLE! YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT MEDICAL STUFF!" growled Stiyl to have the frozen Kamijou move.

Aureolus glowered at Stiyl with razor sharp eyes. "**Explode from the inside, rune magician.**"

With a mysterious and uncomfortable noise, as commanded, the rune magician had expanded like a balloon and then exploded. Blood, flesh, bones and internal organs splattered the area. Flesh and blood stained the ceiling, making a large oval shape. The entire room, covered in the human body, was like one large museum created from the magician's flesh.

"…!"

The truly terrifying thing was the fact that the blood vessels were intact, the

heart undamaged. Like the map of a train, the visible heart pumped blood through the long blood vessels into the internal organs and back into the heart.

He was alive. Even like that, Stiyl Magnus was alive.

Pala pala…

Rune cards scattered like sakura petals from possibly the magician's pockets.

Thump! Index, who was sitting blankly on the table, had fainted at the cruel image.

"Da-Damn it!"

Kamijou hurriedly tried to think of a way to prevent the horrifying situation from paralyzing him and tried to hold back the voice wanting to cry out. Stiyl had never asked Kamijou to save him. He knew this would become the result but still told Kamijou the important words. It was imperative that Kamijou thoroughly analyzed the enormous clue.

YOU IDIOT! IT'S EASY FOR YOU TO BEAT AUREOLUS! THAT GUY'S WEAKNESS IS THE NEEDLE! YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT MEDICAL STUFF!

Kamijou began to decipher his words.

Needles... medical stuff?

Aureolus had repeatedly used needles to stab his neck. Stabbing needles into his own neck… was that the reference? Academy City used various drugs as a part of the esper development program which meant it had vast pharmaceutical and medicinal knowledge unknown to the outside world. Like remember English words during a vocabulary test, Kamijou's mind pieced together its understanding of acupuncture.

From the standpoint of regulating breathing through Asian medicine and factors, acupuncture therapy's purpose was the stimulation of the nerves to reduce pain or control internal organ functions. In a time period lacking anesthesia, it was an important part of treatment that was like magic.

But... what about it? Kamijou tilted his head and continued to analyze.

The fact that modern operations abandoned acupuncture meant that it was ineffective in humans and did not have truly desired effects on the mind and body like anesthetics. The most it could accomplish was stimulate endorphin secretion to feel happier and more excited, and relieve some anxiety.

Anxiety?

"**Change the contents. Stop shooting the hidden rifle. Use the bayonet to eliminate the intruders.**"

Kamijou stood idly by as he forgot to run forward. With Aureolus' words, he recovered. The muskets' bayonets in the alchemist's hands aimed at Kamijou were spinning, signs of death.

Despite the imminent danger, Kamijou's suspicions were not ignorable. With one suspicion came a chain reaction creating more suspicions.

That's right. It's too weird.

In Himegami and Stiyl's case the alchemist had said "die" and "explode" to kill them. If he could truly do anything, was it not simpler to command that Kamijou lose the ability in his right hand?

That's right! Something's not right!

If he could do anything, why did he need vampires and Deep Blood? If he could create anything, could he not create vampires with his own power?

That's right. There's something wrong with this!

Also, if Aureolus Izzard could do anything he desired, why did Index ignore him?

What if Aureolus Izzard's ultimate Ars Magna did not alter reality through his words but through his thought?

"Do-Don't tell me… I see…"

It was no wonder Stiyl had told him that it was a simple matter for Kamijou to defeat the alchemist. Because Aureolus understood the powers of Stiyl, Index and Himegami, they could not defeat him. But, Kamijou was an exception. Having met for the first time today, Aureolus had no grasp on the stranger's strength.

IMPOSSIBLE! HIMEGAMI AISA'S DEATH WAS ALREADY DECIDED! DOES YOUR RIGHT HAND POSSESS SOME SORT OF HOLY VATICAN SECRET ART!?

Anxious was certainly nervous at the time. For an omnipotent being to have anxiety in his heart…

"I understand. So it's like that." Kamijou muttered lightly. It was unimpressive and even simple after understanding the truth.

"Hmph. It seems the source of your confidence is that mysterious right hand of yours." Aureolus calmly stared at the spacey Kamijou, stabbing his neck with another needle. "If that's the case, I'll start by cutting off your right hand. **Hidden rifle: rotate-fire your blade**!"

Soundless, Aureolus swung his right hand, sending the bayonet spinning at Kamijou with the terrifying speed of an electric fan. He himself barely saw the trajectory of the blade and what actually flew over.

One moment, the musket-sword rested in the alchemist's hand.

One moment, it had severed Kamijou's arm and stabbed into the back wall.

It felt like a hot knife had sliced through butter as Kamijou's right arm was sliced neatly down his shoulder.

His right arm rotated in midair. It was painless and heatless. Kamijou stared absentmindedly at his detached arm.

My right hand's been sliced off?

Kamijou stared at the spinning arm.

An omnipotent person who can crush my heart heard with a single sentence…

His mind had not been distorted from pain or fear as his thoughts reached the ultimate question.

…chose to slice off my right hand?

He combined his suspicions to formulate his answer.

He's definitely someone who can do what he wants…

Eventually, fresh blood gushed out of severed joint.

But can't do anything to the power of my right hand?

He still felt no pain and no heat.

He could only slice off my right arm to take away Imagine Breaker?

The arm spun in the air until it hit something hard, dropping to the floor.

Eventually, he found the answer from the various suspicions. He knew what he had to do and the rest was simply.

Kamijou heard his mind flip a switch.

Part 2

**KUKUKUKUHAHAHA

Faced with such an unexpected response, Aureolus backed away. The boy with one arm was absolutely sneering.

Is he crazy from pain and fear!? No, that's not right…

His smile was one of confidence, a very natural smile that indicated his belief of victory. To remain normal in that critical situation was most abnormal

What… What's going on? Aureolus was more dissatisfied than afraid. Though he did not know what thoughts ran through the boy's head, the victor was already decided. In which case, there was no reason to feel unhappy.

Deciding to end his life, he impatiently tossed aside a needle and began his commands. "**Hidden rifle appears in my hand. Load with magic bullets. One will suffice.**" Swinging his right hand, and as commanded, a Western sword with a rapid-fire musket pistol appeared in his hand. Rather satisfied with his perfect magic, he continued. "**Application is crushing. Following the original rifle concept, fire the blade to crush prey's head into pieces!**"

Aureolus squeezed the trigger and the magic bullet loaded with gunpowder flew toward the eyeball of the maniacally laughing boy. Though a low-velocity projectile, it would still pierce the brain if it hit the eyeball. Still, it was not a velocity that humans could dodge and not a defendable force. The boy could do little more but stare and watch as his brain was splattered like a tomato.

…But nothing happened.

"What?" Aureolus began to distrust his very own eyes as the blue magic bullet aimed precisely at the boy's eye had somehow grazed the stagnant boy, hitting the wall behind him.

Did I miscalculate the distance? No…

Aureolus commanded once more. "**Repeat the previous command. Application is strafe firing. Simultaneously fire ten hidden rifles!**"

The discussed ten rifles appeared out of thin air and fired bullets like a bouquet of flowers. However, the ten accurately aimed bullets all proceeded to fly past the boy, leaving him unharmed.

A MISSFIRE!? HOW COULD THAT!? Stunned, Aureolus stared at the boy who had escaped death twice. The bleeding shoulder gushed unbelievable amounts of fresh bled from the sliced joint, splattering blood onto his face, covering it with blood.

The boy still spoke. As if the vilest parts of his body were gushing from the sliced arm, the boy continued to smile.

In response, the offender decided to give the command for a third attempt at killing his enemy.

But he didn't do anything. He evaded Ars Magna twice!?

He stopped his actions as he felt doubt. He knew the abilities of his spell the best and he knew they were not attacks evadable through luck.

Don't tell me he's planning something I didn't foresee!?

In his heart, the boy seemed to laugh as he stuck his tongue out, licking the blood on his lips like sauce. Even a fallen vampire would not have reveled in its own blood!

WHAT'S—GOING—ON? Aureolus could not stop the anxiety bubbling from within. *WHAT ON EARTH IS THIS GUY? HE CAN STILL FIGHT WITH THAT BODY? WITHOUT A RIGHT ARM? IMPOSSIBLE! TOTALLY ILLOGICAL! THIS GUY WILL DIE FROM THE INTENSE BLOOD LOSS! IT'S ALRIGHT. THERE'S NO PROBLEM! THERE SHOULD BE NO PROBLEM! THERE'S NO PROBLEM BUT—!*

It was the moment that anxiety had formed in his heart…

The boy had lost his right hand, and with it, his powers. That pitiable image seemed to mutter, sneer and laugh as it stared at the alchemist.

"Ku… ah… Ugh. Damn you… YOU WON'T SURVIVE BEFORE THE EXISTENCE OF MY ARS MAGNA! **DEPLOY A COUNTLESS NUMBER OF GUILLOTINES TO QUICKLY DISMANTLE THAT BODY!**"

As he had finished speaking, numerous, enormous guillotines appeared on the ceiling space above the boy's head like the cracking of the surface. Each was a

blade of execution weighing over 100 kilograms. Before those murderous tools of gravity, Kamijou simply sneered, intending to neither evade nor defend.

IT'S ALRIGHT! HE CAN'T GET AWAY FROM THIS! IT WILL HIT! HE'LL DIE AS HE'S MASSACRED! I GAVE THE ORDER! I GAVE AN ORDER I GAVE AN ORDER I GAVE AN ORDER! IT SHOULD BE ALRIGHT! THERE'S NO NEED TO WORRY! Aureolus repeated consolations in his heart over and over and over again. As long as events unfolded as he had commanded, the boy would die. Though he would surely die, doubts continued to creep into heart as if his silent wish was to remove his heart's anxieties.

As Aureolus had wished, an infinite number of enormous guillotines appeared above him… as the boy sneered. His expression seemed to say that he knew Aureolus' weaknesses.

Ku. DAMN IT! WHY!?

The alchemist had no hesitation as he glared at Kamijou like he wanted to pierce him through.

"**DIE! BOY—**"

Before his roaring command had completed, doubts crept into his mind.

Can I really kill him with just that word?

With trembling hands, he tried to take the needle out of his neck but caused numerous unused needles to drop onto the floor, something he had no time to worry about. Aureolus Izzard trembled as he stared at Kamijou. The formerly piercing gaze became as blunt as a rusted blade. Unbelievably, his control over his legs seemed limited as he stumbled away, stepping on something, crushing some of the numerous needles dropped onto the floor.

Ars Magna turned a person's wishes into reality. But, once Aureolus believed that he could not win, could not defeat someone, those also became reality, becoming a double-edged sword. It was the reason why he could not create vampires and needed Deep Blood for his goals. The doubts in his heart that he "could not create this" were why he could not form them in reality.

Each and every order was like a bullet. If he were to simply think, numerous

random thoughts would have mixed in. Thus, the ambiguousness of the order would have prevented its occurrence. Gathering his concentration, he could fire his command like a bullet. And, like when learning English words, reciting out loud simplified the process.

Ars Magna was not a spell that turned anything spoken into reality but a spell that turned imagination into reality. Aureolus Izzard had lost control of his verbal ability. Before, he converted ambiguous thoughts into words and automatically created reality. It was like a handgun that fired without human interface. In order to prevent such a situation, he had prepared a countermeasure.

DAMN IT. WHERE ARE MY NEEDLES? WHY DID THEY LAND ON THE FLOOR!? I USED NEED THEM TO EASE MY ANXIETY! WITHOUT THEM—! In shock, Aureolus held his breath. *IF I DON'T HAVE THEM WHAT WILL HAPPEN? STOP? NO! STOP THINKING! IF I CONTINUE TO THINKING THEY'LL BECOME PERMANENT!*

The more he considered running away, the further his thoughts divulged. It was a known fact that he could not stop. If he did stop, it meant he had consented to his own powerlessness. Like a rolling snowball, Aureolus' doubts went out of control and lost all meaning.

The boy before him said nothing. He said nothing and only silently walked, causing Aureolus even more anxiousness. He could not stop the boy and did not know what to order to do so. Aureolus Izzard could do nothing but wait until the boy closed in like a scarecrow.

Somehow, the boy was already there.

They faced each other with Index and the table between then. It was an event of irony. At that point, the alchemist was like prey frozen by the gaze of a snake.

THAT'S RIGHT! STIYL. INDEX. HIMEGAMI AISA. I KNOW ALL OF THEM. I KNEW THEIR POWERS AND THE FACT THEY WEREN'T A MATCH FOR MY ARS MAGNA. ONLY THIS BOY IS DIFFERENT!! I MET THE BOY FOR THE FIRST TIME AND DON'T KNOW HIS POWER! I DON'T KNOW IF ARS MAGNA GOLDEN ALCHEMY IS EFFECTIVE ON HIM!!!

OI!

Suddenly hearing the boy's voice, Aureolus trembled like a child being lectured.

"YOU DIDN'T THINK THAT YOU COULD GET RID OF MY IMAGINE BREAKER BY JUST CUTTING OFF MY RIGHT HAND, DID YA!?!"

Kamijou bared his fangs while his eyes seemed to glow reddish gold. He had spoken from the bottom of his heart.

WA-WAIT! STOP THINKING—! DON—ANXIETY—NOW I NEED—! Unable to reign in his thoughts, the alchemist could only pray.

Then, an abnormal change began on Kamijou's right shoulder that was releasing blood like a fountain. The blood loss increased and an object formed as if the blood were being splattered all over a transparent glass statue. And the unbelievable object began to take shape.

What formed on his shoulder was not a human's arm.

It was a head, a savage, two meter long head seen only in ancient legends, the head of a large and almighty King Dragon.

What should have been a transparent head was dyed with blood. The boy raised it and swung it, slowing opening the jaws containing rows of saw-like teeth.

It seemed like it was revealing the right hand's true identity.

Its teeth were bared.

At first glance, nothing seemed to happen. However, in the unseen world, it changed while the alchemist's once dominant presence disappeared.

It was as if the role of the protagonist was forcibly ripped away.

WHA—

Aureolus looked up and found that the repulsive human constellation observatory consisting of Stiyl Magnus' flesh and blood began to gather together from all over the room. It was like the command to explode was repealed.

DON'T TELL ME HE'S REVIVING!? LIKE WHAT HAPPENED TO HIMEGAMI!? THE PEOPLE DESTROYED CAN—

As Aureolus considered the idea, Stiyl reformed and landed onto the floor, completely unharmed. In turn, Aureolus felt like his spine were being stabbed by an icy pillar. Naturally, the magician's revival was caused by Aureolus' anxieties.

HOLD ON… THIS IS JUST… MY... ANXIETIES… CALM DOWN… AS LONG AS I… CONTROL MY ANXIETY… I CAN DEFINITELY… MAKE THIS RIDICULOUS MONSTER… DISAPPEAR!

Attempting to reign in the sensation crushing his heart, Aureolus attempted his final resistance. It was surely a monster that Aureolus had created and, so long as he had calmed himself down, the mystical beast residing in the boy would surely have disappeared. But, the transparent King Dragon glared silently at the alchemist with both eyes.

And, like that, Aureolus' vision faded from the sheer horror.

IM… POSSIBLE… I CAN'T… WIN…

Simultaneous to those thoughts, the King Dragon's mouth widened until its maximum, completely swallowing the alchemist head first.

Epilogue: Deep Blood of Corruption. *Devil_or_God.*

“I really think your injuries are really interesting every time.” In a pure white hospital room, a middle-aged-looking doctor with a face like a frog’s spoke to Kamijou.

“...”

Kamijou knew not what to say as he lied on the table, lowering his head to look at the arm held in plaster. The severed limb was repaired neatly for likely the best. The cells near the sliced area were undamaged and, after a day of emergency treatment, the arm itself was successfully reattached. “A pinky sliced off by a delinquent can be reattached,” was the type of information that Kamijou had. However, no one had imagined that such a major reassembly of the arm was possible. However, with such disgusting information in his mind, Kamijou truly did not understand what kind of person he was before he had lost his memories.

“As a side note, you’ve been hospitalized twice in ten days and, naturally, you’ve become a topic of discussion among the nurses. Don’t tell me you have a fetish for nurses?”

“…What are you talking about? Would I have ended up on the emergency room table for something like that?”

“Really? A pity, I thought I’d found a compatriot.”

Kamijou stared wordlessly at the frog-faced doctor. *Did he become a doctor for that kind of reason?* If it were the case, Kamijou wanted to change doctors and press the emergency call button.

“Hm? Please don’t be mistaken though. I prefer to ‘do it’ than be ‘done in.’ Also, I prefer the delivery platform from the operation table.”

“SHUT UP! NO ONE WANTS TO LISTEN TO THE SPECIFICS! AND STOP DEMONSTRATING IT TO ME, THAT’S DISGUSTING! WHY ISN’T A

NURSE TAKING CARE OF ME!?” Like that, Kamijou actually pressed the emergency call button.

The doctor gave a look of despair saying, “I’m going then,” and walked out of the patient’s room.

What the heck? Why did it look like he thought it was a pity?

Immediately after he left, another person, Stiyl Magnus, a man who seemed out of place in Japanese culture, walked in.

“Though I don’t want to get close to you or be friends with you at all, I came here out of courtesy.”

“Let me ask you something… Why are you strutting around as if nothing happened? Tell me why.”

Stiyl unhappily puffed his cheeks and chose not to say anything. Between the two of them, Kamijou was the one less tactful about injuries. Though, he was somewhat justified as Stiyl had his flesh and bones broken and scattered yet at the moment not even a blood vessel was harmed. His organs had splattered the room but he had survived as his blood still circulated. Few could have such precious experiences.

“I actually wanted to more or less thank you for this one. But, when I thought about it, there’s no need. All you did was let Aureolus self-destruct.”

“Hmph. This is all thanks to this Kamijou Touma’s perfect acting skills!”

It was true that Kamijou Touma had lacked the ability to defeat Aureolus Izzard. His magic turned one’s thoughts into reality and, as such, he had needed to ensure that he believed… that Aureolus Izzard could not possibly defeat Kamijou Touma.

To achieve it, Kamijou Touma had bluffed. In fact, the boy had forgotten the fact he had lost his right arm. Though he was supposed to act somewhat properly, in reality, his mind had numbed from the intense pain and shock. According to some suicidal individuals, excessive blood loss brought about a kind of high, which explained his slasher smile.

Of course, the truth was undetectable. Considering his need to act, he raised it up to eleven.

“Speaking of which, it’s pretty unbelievable that you survived. I got my arm cut off but you became a human constellation exhibit. It feels like we’ll appreciate the value of life again… Oi. Why do you look like you’re about to laugh?”

“Nothing. By your attitude, I was just thinking you didn’t realize I was secretly helping you.” Stiyl smirked with apparent condescension. “After you lost your arm, you managed to dodge Aureolus’ bullets without dodging, remember? How do you think that happened?”

“…Ah?”

“Your acting did fool Aureolus but he wouldn’t have believed you right away, right? After you lost your arm and started your bluff, the main reason why he was fooled by it was because you dodged his attacks twice, right?”

“Erm…” Kamijou stared back like a fool.

“You still don’t understand after I said so much? Basically, the reason why he missed the first two times wasn’t because of your acting but because I used my magic to create an optical illusion around Aureolus.”

“What…?” Kamijou looked at him with surprised.

“What’s so surprising about that? I specialize in fire magic. Using heated air to create mirages and manipulate light refraction to create optical errors is not outside my area of ability.”

“Ho-Hold on! I’m not surprised about that! Weren’t you blown to pieces and splattered all over the ceiling? How were you able to cast magic in human constellation mode?”

“Human constellation is an interesting description… but, this is none to strange, is it? I was alive the whole time so of course I could refine life force to create magic. It’s a good thing my rune cards were scattered all over the floor when I exploded!”

Kamijou looked at him with confusion. For an incident involving vampires and

Deep Blood, Stiyl was the most frightening one.

“You don’t have to worry about it. I suppose you know the sin you committed during this incident, right? I’m here today to discuss the developments for Misawa Cram.”

Sin.

Kamijou turned to look at the right hand covered in plaster that had once housed a King Dragon. Though it was a self-destructive illusion induced by Aureolus’ own anxieties, the one who had forced the alchemist down the path to self-destruction was none other than Kamijou.

Stiyl sighed. “No need for that expression. What Aureolus imagined was a mental image of the King Dragon, not physical. It was an illusion. Though you couldn’t physically touch it, it was something could devour stuff like souls.”

???

“It means you didn’t harm Aureolus physically but he is mentally broken.”

“…Is that something worth bragging about?”

“Of course it is. In terms of the conclusion, we stripped his memories and that settled it. In this battle involving such a powerful magician, the final casualty count was that one member of the 13 Knights by the lift. In the 2,000 years of recorded magic history, this is the third time such a happy ending occurred.”

Is this really something to be happy about? Kamijou wondered. He then wondered if the Gregorian Chant of the Roman Catholic Church was safe. Perhaps Stiyl, who had once gotten his memories wiped, could not remember.

“Speaking of which, where did the memory-less Aureolus Izzard go?”

Is he in this hospital?

“Oh, is there a need to ask? I killed him.” He said so matter-of-factly that Kamijou suspected whether he had heard it incorrectly.

“What’s with the expression? Listen. Aureolus Izzard first betrayed the Catholic

Church and became an alchemist. Then, he imprisoned Deep Blood and turned Misawa Cram into his fortress. He basically rebelled against the entirety of Academy City and the Christian sects that were wiped out trying to hunt him. He's someone with a huge bounty on his head. Of course, Necessarius, which mostly carries out witch-hunts and includes me and Index, had a mission to kill him." Stiyl seemed impatient in the room that forbade smoking.

"Look. Going against so many world organizations, could a memory-less Aureolus Izzard fight them? Simply put, without memories or anything to protect, did he have the will to rebel against the entire world?"

"..."

"Aureolus definitely would have died that simply. The enemies would have killed him with even crueler methods and, most importantly, Aureolus Izzard is the only magician in history to successfully cast Ars Magna. Of course, many organizations would interrogate him severely for this spell. And, worst of all, without his memories, giving a testimony would be impossible." Stiyl said reluctantly. "So he only had to options. One was death and the other was an even more painful Hell. In my opinion, I'd have chosen the former without hesitation."

However, Kamijou still could not accept it.

"I still can't accept it. I just can't. Even if it were the only option, we can't just treat killing someone as okay. If we didn't care about human lives, why did we charge into Misawa Cram?"

Certainly, the Kamijou's motivation to fight was driven from the numerous things that he disagreed with. Deep Blood was treated as a tool, the students were sacrificial materials for the Gregorian Chant and Limen Magna while Aureolus had eventually even killed Himegami in a fit of rage. Because of the blatant disregard for human life, Kamijou had approached the battlefield rather than retreat. If, at the end, they accepted a person's death as a good thing, the guilt that Kamijou's fists had caused would have consumed him.

"…"

Even if Aureolus Izzard were someone unforgivable, he was not atrociously bad. At that time, despite the fact he could do anything, Index had never returned to

him. Even if there were a possibility of rejection, he was unwilling to give her to command, proving the sliver of humanity in him.

“This’s why I say you’re too naïve.” Stiyl Magnus looked away and spoke calmly. “When I said I killed him, I didn’t necessarily say I took his life away, right?”

Stunned, Kamijou stared at Stiyl's face.

Stiyl spoke with a disinterested tone while avoiding Kamijou’s gaze. “Listen, Aureolus Izzard lost his memories. If I reshaped his face, wouldn’t it mean his appearance and personality were completely different? It would no longer be Aureolus Izzard. Wouldn’t it mean that he was dead to the world?”

“Are you actually a good guy?”

“What do you mean by that? I'm an Anglican priest after all. And, considering I specialize in flames, it wouldn’t be hard for me to burn a face and turn it into a different one.”

“…YOU'RE ACTUALLY A GREAT GUY!”

“Hm? I'm really surprised by that response... HOLD ON! WHAT ARE YOU HUGGING ME FOR!? STOP TREADING YOUR TOES ON MY HEAD!!”

As Kamijou and Stiyl tugged at each other in the hospital room, the door opened and Index walked in without knocking. “Touma! They’re selling honey-flavored chips in the shops! It’s so interesting I wanna buy it! But I don’t have money! … Eh?”

She froze. She saw the struggling magician and the truly touched Kamijou Touma as he tried to touch the magician’s head.

The three of them stopped. The world stopped.

"Touma… Erm… sorry for interrupting you."

"Ho-Hold on a minute! What are you doing? Why’re you looking away!? OI! DON’T GO AWAY WITHOUT RESPONDING!!” GYYYAAAAHHH!! Kamijou cried out as he tried to pull Index as she tried to leave the room. In that

situation, he couldn’t say to the young girl, “Sorry Index, I’m interested in you but it would go against social norms.” Kamijou wondered with confusion how he would settle the matter.

"…"

Stiyl Magnus stares at the two of them as they argued with each other rather happily. As if seeing them in their natural environment, Stiyl Magnus continued to watch. He felt neither envy nor hate because he had chosen that path for the sake of protecting Index’s smiles. With satisfaction, he looked at the face of the girl he desired to protect.

"Fu. Well, the next mission awaits me. I should be off now." He said with casual satisfaction.

Index carefully watched Stiyl’s face as she hurriedly hid behind Kamijou’s back. She looked like a sneaking private investigator as she peeked at the magician’s face from behind the boy.

Stiyl thought little of it and raised his foot as he prepared to leave the room.

Such were the consequences of his chosen path.

"Erm." As he took a step out of the room, she spoke up.

Stiyl turned, expecting to find an Index angry at him for dragging Kamijou Touma into the Misawa Cram School incident. There was no reason for her not to scold him.

"First, I should start off by thanking you. Thank you." Instead, Index said thank you.

"If Touma knew that the building was going to be like that, Touma would have run in even alone. So, it's great that you were around. And… eh? What's wrong?"

"It's nothing." Stiyl chuckled. Then with no more words, Stiyl turned his back and silently exited. Which incidentally, Touma thought was the first time he had seen him smile.

"Touma!"

Kamijou’s gaze turned from the door to Index. She seemed rather unhappy that his focus was off of her as she puffed her cheeks and looked at Kamijou’s eyes. Seeing her like that, Kamijou inadvertently smiled. *The battlefield Misawa Cram was cruel but I still managed to survive.*

Kamijou Touma had a realistic experience as he remembered a doubt he had left on the battlefield.

The King Dragon’s head had emerged from the severed right arm.

It was supposed to be a monster created by Aureolus’ fear of Kamijou. That was the logical analysis. But, in that situation, had Aureolus Izzard truly imagined that there was a transparent King Dragon’s head living exploding out of Kamijou’s right shoulder?

The likelihood was low but what if, just what if, that monster was unrelated to Aureolus’ powers?

...

Impossible.

However, Kamijou remembered Himegami Aisa, the Deep Blood, who had a power only effective on vampires. Considering that her power capable of killing vampires had caused so many incidents to revolve around her, how valuable was Imagine Breaker, Kamijou’s right hand, that negated even miracles?

In essence the basic question: *What is Imagine Breaker?*

"Touma! Honeydew-flavored potato chips!" Index's words returned Kamijou to reality.

"A-Ahhh. Okay okay... If it's honeydew-flavored, it should be sweet, right?" Kamijou tried to match Index’s discussion with an ambiguous response.

Perhaps the status quo was fine. No matter how unexplainable that power was, so long as he could use it to protect the girl before him, there was little else to ask for.

So, let’s keep things like this. Like this…

"Touma, Touma. Wasn't there a girl called Himegami Aisa?" While walking down the corridor that led to the shops, Index suddenly asked.

"Ah, that wave loving girl Denpa Kei who liked to pretend to be a spellcaster [3] What's about her? Hm? Index, what's up? You mentioned her, so why do you look so unhappy?"

"…Touma, you fought for Aisa this time, right? Not for me, but for Aisa!"

"What?" Surprised, Kamijou tilted his neck. For some reason, Index, who had said the ridiculous words, seemed rather irritated as she deliberately puffed up her cheeks in front of Kamijou.

"Nothing! It's nothing!" Index muttered some words and continued. "Ah. Also, it seems Aisa’s staying in this hospital. I just spoke with her."

Kamijou reacted passively. *Oh. Oh yeah, what will happen to Himegami? She doesn’t want to attract vampires again but the Misawa Cram boundary shouldn’t exist anymore. Though it was apparently possible to replace it with a Walking Church like the one Index wore, the Aureolus Izzard that had promised to make one no longer existed.*

“I talked to her for a while and decided to keep her in the Church.”

“For some reason, I know what happens next. Can I say it out loud first?”

"GAH! I’d actually prepared this for a long time and Touma still wants to say the ending? You really don't know how a script goes! Shakespeare might stab you with a knife!”

"Stop laughing while you talk about stabbing!" Kamijou sighed and stated the answer that anyone could have predicted. "In conclusion, the Walking Church is a type of Church, right?"

Afterword

To the readers who read the first volume, it's been a while.

To the brave souls who read from the second volume, nice to meet you.

I'm Kazuma Kamachi.

It's now time for the afterword. According to some readers, the first thing they read is the afterword. In other words, the afterword is the second synopsis. Anyway, please read the afterword, and if you like it, you may bring it to the counter to buy it.

However, please let me warn the readers who like to read the afterword first: the following content does include some plot spoilers, so, to the readers who haven't read the main content, it is best that you don’t read this first.

The following content of the afterword is written to those readers who read the afterword at the end and the brave souls who don't care about whether they know the content beforehand.

The main theme of this volume is “BAD END”.

To be blunt, Aureolus Izzard is a failed version of Kamijou Touma. When I was writing, I thought that if Kamijou Touma failed in the first volume, he would have become such a person. The reason I created Himegami was also to create a tragic girl who could never be the heroine.

As the story went on, the murderous atmosphere became extremely intense. However, what's different is that in the first volume, even if they were enemies, at least they would listen to the main character before fighting. However, in this volume, even the second heroine didn’t like to listen too much, let alone the Big Bad.

As for magic, the story revolves around the key term Ars Magna.

Even though in the story, I made it to be the real essence of an alchemist, it was actually made up by me. In fact, it was said that the Bosnian sect of Alchemy (who created the concept of turning lead into gold) appeared in the late Roman period, but Ars Magna was created in the 17th century, so the time difference between them was quite large. The 17th century was the time when alchemy was widespread, and was also the time when fake magicians used it to fool nobility out of their money. In other words, Ars Magna was like a new religion that rode the wave of alchemy.

In fact, the goal of Ars Magna wasn't to create gold or make an immortal elixir. The concept was "Humans are incomplete gods.” In other words, through training and becoming complete, humans could become gods. It really fit the mold of a new religion. From the term God that's used now, one can find that such alchemy was mixed into Christian culture.

In the story itself, the spell Aureolus used to turn his imagination into reality was closer to the Zurich alchemist sect. This sect mixed in some psychiatric views of Jung, and the goal was to “do alchemy in the mind”, which really sounded ambiguous.

Also, there's another alchemist sect called Vienna, but this sect included some sexual magic rituals that were quite erotic and shouldn't be included in Dengeki Bunko (laughs).

One reason why alchemist sects were so abundant was said to be because “the nature of alchemy” itself was a mystery. But in fact, perhaps the commonly accepted reason was that alchemists lied to the rich saying they could turn lead into gold, but failed and had to offer all sorts of excuses to appease their anger.

After writing so much, in the end, what did I want to say?

What I wanted to say was that after researching so much into alchemy, I really

used very little information.

In order to increase Index's role, I even wanted to add a “kitchen alchemy trick plot”. But, I guess I decided against including such a minor subplot.

Finally, I want to thank the related personnel in this story.

Miki-san, who's in charge of editing, is someone really intimidating who forced me to write a story within 17 days. He still followed me through until the end of this story that has loopholes all over it, and I'm really grateful for him.

As for Haimura-san, the illustrator, actually, I’ve never met him. A comrade I’ve never met, though that sounds cool, I really want to meet him and thank him. Anyway, let me rehearse it on paper. Thank you, Haimura-san.

And to the readers who bought this book, thank you for your support. I hope that we can meet next time. At this point, let me put my pen down.

Misaka Mikoto didn't even have a chance to appear in this volume (tears).

~Kazuma Kamachi

Notes

1. ↑ or Denpa Otome goes for "wave girl". "Denpa" is a term to coin someone who has a really strange or eccentric behavior without any apparent reason, hence "the wave made me do it"; you might recognize the word as it is also the name of a novel, where the titular character is actually quite weird.
2. ↑ wiki/Black Jack
3. ↑ or Denpa Kei is similar to the term "Denpa Onna" used in the prologue, "kei" goes for someone who is an incredible fanatic of something, for example "Akiba-Kei" refers to someone "who is in love with Akiba products (an otaku)"; in this case Denpa Kei means that Aisa loves to act strangely (denpa) with no apparent reason at all

Toaru Majutsu no Index — Volume 02

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